The Nation.

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EDITORIAL

TIT FOR TAT FOR WHAT?

Protesting Israel's assassination of Palestine Liberation Organization commander Abu Jihad, Israeli Minister Without Portfolio Ezer Weizman observed, "It doesn't contribute to the fight against terrorism; in principle it only creates more. It distances the peace process and will bring greater hostility and make us more vulnerable around the world." The same relatively mild, instrumentalist critique could also be applied to last week's attack by U.S. forces on two Iranian oil platforms in the Persian Gulf.

From the vantage point of imperial Washington, it may have seemed not a bad time for a bit of warmongering. The impending Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan removes a pretext for the original deployment of U.S. forces in the gulf. With anti-Communism no longer available to justify the big stick, anti-Khomeinism will serve just as well and could help prop up support for defense spending in the bargain. Congressional concerns about executive-branch interventions vanished into thin air after a little symbolic pre-strike consultation. And defense Democrats like Senator Sam Nunn are moving to gut the neglected War Powers Act.

No one in the capital can explain how an escalation of reprisals can be avoided, or what the American ships in the gulf are supposed to accomplish. Former Secretary of the Navy James Webb called them "floating targets that are invitations to an international incident." But these invitations were not sent by accident; they are part of a provocative plan. Last week's strikes in the gulf and Tunisia were intended to provide a lesson to other nations—both those inclined toward international mediation of conflicts and those seeking some independence from American hegemony: The United States and its proxies reserve the right to attack adversaries unilaterally. Translation: This could mean war.

BURYING CHERNOBYL
Philippe Sands

BRAZIL ON THE BRINK
Linda Rabben

FINANCING ECOCIDE
Susan George

DISCOVERY—'THE NATION' POETRY WINNERS

THE BECHTEL STORY
David Weir

BLACK FEMINIST CRITICISM
Jewelle Gomez

KERRY'S DRUG HEARINGS

CAN HE LIFT THE C.I.A. VEIL?

DAVID CORN

Seated before Senator John Kerry's Foreign Relations subcommittee, Michael Palmer, a drug trafficker turned *contra* supplier, recited the history of a DC-6 airplane he had used to ferry goods to the rebels as a State Department contractor. First, the plane had been piloted by him on smuggling trips. Then it was abandoned during a failed drug run and seized by U.S. Customs Service agents. Years later, Palmer bought it back from Customs and transferred it to Vortex, a Miami firm that employed Palmer and had the Federal *contra* supply contract. Then it was sold to an "American company" that "assisted the *contras*." What firm was this? Senator Kerry did not ask. Later on, Kerry explained he was "prohibited for obvious reasons" from tracing the plane's pedigree any further—a tip-off that Palmer had passed the aircraft to a C.I.A.-linked business. That unasked question illuminates one daunting obstacle Kerry has confronted during his investigation and hearings into the drug trade's influence in Latin American politics: what to do when he runs into the Company.

After two weeks of public hearings, Kerry's subcommittee has thus far spotlighted narcothugs. Testimony showed Panama's Gen. Manuel Noriega did business with the dealers; that Col. Jean-Claude Paul of Haiti cashed in on cocaine; and that the *contras*—to an as yet undefined extent—obtained financial support from traffickers or trafficking. Kerry, a Democrat, has brought before the television cameras the drug smugglers George Morales and Gary Betzner, who repeated their already publicized

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EXCHANGE.

On Sorel, Lear and Sexism

In its March 5 issue, The Nation *published a cartoon by Edward Sorel titled "Enter Queen Lear, Triumphant." It was about Frances Lear, publisher of the new magazine* Lear's. *Thirty-four members of* The Nation*'s staff registered a complaint in print that the cartoon was sexist, and they opposed its publication. We asked our regularly contributing artists what they thought. Herewith is a sampler of responses to the issue from our artists and other readers.*

New York City
Just because a drawing is mean and stupid is no excuse not to run it. What is it about Frances Lear that makes Sorel angry? Is it that she has more money than anyone needs? Is it that she is buying into the magazine business? Is it that she might be desperately vain? Certainly she is entitled to these things and could hardly hurt anyone in the process.

What Sorel should have focused on is the mediocrity of *Lear's.* It has been packaged the same way television series are, bland formulas to "épater la bourgeoisie." *J-C Suarès*

New York City
No, I did not find Ed Sorel's cartoon to be sexist—if that is the question. Nor did I think it was a cheap shot. Caricaturists are supposed to criticize those in the public eye. Having publicized her divorce and having published a magazine, Lear is by no means a private person. Although there are probably more important targets, Sorel has the right to choose his game as he sees fit. That is the nature of social satire and the job of a good satirist. Give the poor guy a raise. *Louise Fili*

New York City
I have seen the "Queen Lear" drawings by Edward Sorel. Although the cartoon is well-conceived, well-written and masterfully drawn, I notice that it possesses truthful observation and ironic comment. That mixture can cause humor to occur. In this case, it does.

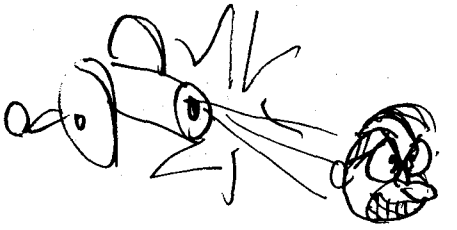
As any sensitized, fair-minded doctrinaire thinker knows, there is nothing funny or ironic about any woman in the entire world (or history). If Sorel is allowed to make fun of a woman, he might feel free to do the same about politicians, the military, religious leaders, educators, sport, writers, artists and people in show business.

As for the oppressed lady who was so terribly maligned by Sorel, it is a well-known fact that she earned her money the old-fashioned way: She got it. *Arnold Roth*

Westport, Conn.
Maybe Frances Lear is a completely inept person who has indulged herself by using the millions granted her in a divorce and does not really have anything to contribute to the world. Maybe she's an airhead. I don't know. But so what? The millions she received are probably her fair share from her marriage, and she is as entitled to start some harebrained endeavor as some guy who inherits millions from his old man. When both partners start from scratch and build a life together (as I have), they both own the family fortune, and women cannot be condemned as people who "live off" men. We must come to realize the dollar value of the "nonworking" wife's contribution to the life of the marriage. For instance, I could not have formulated an opinion of Ed's cartoon without my wife's help!

I don't think it's in the interests of *The Nation* to print this type of material. We all love Ed and we know he's a very funny old grouch, and everyone should realize that it's just Ed's point of view (warped as it may be), but the magazine should always stand on the "right" side—championing freedom, equal rights and all the good stuff. We all want Ed to be free to express himself any way he wants, but when it goes this blatantly sexist, with the terrible implications that are there—it could set the fine forward-moving standards of *The Nation* back. *Randall Enos*

New York City
Sorel does come on like a loose cannon. But then again, he's so often on target.



I'd call it a good shot. *Bill Charmatz*

New York City
One rule I live by is: If a person has under $111 million, I observe certain niceties—above that amount he/she is fair game. Go Sorel! *Robert Grossman*

New York City
Sexism in *The Nation*? Maybe it is not extraordinary that the cartoon "Enter Queen Lear, Triumphant" by Edward Sorel appeared in your publication. Virulence and anger toward women appear in all guises—are liberals and radicals exempt?

Doesn't *The Nation* have a rich publisher? And just what is wrong with Lear trying a fashion magazine for older women—or do you all like pictures just of young women? I resent page 295 of your March 5 issue, and you owe an apology to all women and to Lear. *Nancy Spero*

P.S. I bet Sorel is more cross-eyed than Lear. What a creep he is, and it's a lousy drawing too! By the way, the small notice "Enter Sexism, Vindictive" did not go unseen. You should have listened to the thirty-four staff members who objected. I join in their outrage.

New York City
Edward Sorel is a superb cartoonist. His work aligns contemporary politics with deep structures, philosophy, myth and psychology. As an artist in this society, he is probably very isolated and does not receive much input, positive or negative.

Sorel's work is critical realism. He attacks corruption and hypocrisy wherever he sees it—just as George Grosz attacked militarism in Weimar Germany, subsequently aligning his work with the left. Attacking the right does not mean that one is ideologically of the left. Grosz's work contained many negative depictions of women, which I am sure he did not see as a contradiction.

Political art, a male domain, historically has been subject to negative stereotyping, as the language is one of limited artistic formulas. Left artists are not immune from or separate from the cultural language and thinking of the dominant class. It is an ideological question as to whether one has the luxury to expose a legitimate contradiction, if in turn that criticism reflects negatively on forces for social change.

The image in art is final, but the growth and development of the artist is not a fixed commodity, and perhaps it would have been a good idea for the thirty-four objectors of the cartoon to explain to Sorel why the content was sexist and offer suggestions on how he could tinker with the idea of bourgeois feminism without attacking women—before publication.

As the crisis in capitalism worsens, precious newsprint becomes an important weapon to combat this rise in brutality. We must break down manufactured isolation and distorted thinking, to help cultural workers become more effective. *Sue Coe*

New York City
I wasn't overly offended. That a member of a discriminated-against group with lots and lots of money should have little trouble overcoming that discrimination seems a legitimately funny idea. That a woman should be stereotyped as ditzy isn't very nice but shouldn't be censored; we need to get a little bit thicker skin. Lampooning a displaced homemaker, however, bugs me. Often discarded after their children are raised and possessing few job skills, women face many obstacles upon re-entering the work force; ridicule is just one of them.

Frances Lear is no ordinary displaced homemaker, though. Rich people have always made good targets. But why be selective? Are Martin Peretz or Eric Utne scrutinized for marrying wealth or are they judged by the quality of *The New Republic*

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EDITORIALS.

Winners & Sinners

With a rare burst of hyperbole and in acknowledgement of his rather more charming cousin, Michael Dukakis announced after the New York primary that he had now "won the Oscar" of preconvention Democratic politics. His Academy Award seems safe from serious challenge. In the half-dozen big-state primaries still to come, Dukakis has but to maintain his 3-to-2 New York margin over Jesse Jackson to come within striking distance of the nomination. Then, with his lion's share of the elite superdelegates and the votes that are either uncommitted or floating free from failed candidates, he could romp to a first-ballot victory in Atlanta on July 20. So much for a brokered convention, the great fear of the Democratic establishment (and the hope of the insurgents) this year. And so much for Governor Mario Cuomo

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and the promise of a *deus ex machina* to rescue the party's center from defeat.

But as so often happens in such ceremonies, awarding the top prize was not the most interesting, nor even perhaps the most consequential outcome of the election in America's second state. The New York primary was actually several contests in one. Besides the statewide vote for delegates and presidential preferences were a bitter referendum on race, a struggle over the political status and future of American Jewry, a campaign to reassert the power of organized labor, a movement to revitalize the left, a test of the possibilities of class politics and the early maneuvers of Mayor Edward Koch's drive to win a fourth term next year.

To a great extent, the Koch component defined the other contests. Hours after the candidates arrived in the city from Wisconsin, the Mayor was off and running at the mouth about Jackson and Jews. Koch has always organized his core constituency around racism and the perceived threat of anti-Semitism. He has always recognized what Jackson recently explained to the editors of *The New York Times*: that Jews in the city feel that they have achieved power as a community, and that their dominance is threatened by minority insurgents from the domestic and external Third World. In areas such as the schools and the labor unions, power has shifted from European ethnics to minorities and from white males to women of color as the middle class has moved to the suburbs and manufacturers have closed up shops.

As a matter of fact, the darker minority became a majority within New York City in the early 1980s, and its strength has been enough to help Cuomo defeat Koch in the crucial Democratic gubernatorial primary of 1982; give Jesse Jackson 33 percent of the vote in the city in the 1984 primary; frighten Koch mightily before his third-term election in 1985, which he won only because the opposition couldn't coalesce around a candidate; and win the city for Jackson last week.

Koch's endorsement of Senator Albert Gore Jr., which confounded many foreign observers, was really no crazier than some of his other political moves. Gore was the vehicle through which he could race-bait Jackson and (he thought) solidify his Jewish support. Dukakis wouldn't do. For one thing, the Massachusetts Governor was committed to a higher road in the campaign that would not allow for Kochian *meshugas*. For another, the Dukakis campaign was being organized, sotto voce, by Cuomo allies and operatives, and what was left in its wake would not be easily available for Koch to use for his purposes next year. Gore's desperate groveling to Koch's dwindling base made him the perfect patsy for the Mayor, a kind of political *Shabbes goy* to light the fires of racism, over which Koch would cook his campaign.

Alas for Gore, it was not to be. Koch certainly frightened white voters into voting their race, as white politicians in other polarized places have done. In Illinois, for instance, as well as in the more obvious Southern locales, Jackson's share of the "white vote" was ten or twenty percentage points lower than in states where whites have not been organized to struggle for power against newly enfranchised minorities. But this time Koch went too far. He began to sound like one of the homeless screamers he has tried to lock up in psychiatric wards, and the net effect of his rantings was to send New Yorkers flocking to the sane establishment candidate.

But the story doesn't end there. Koch made himself the target for the development of a coalition of blacks and Hispanics, newly militant unions and progressive professionals, gays and lesbians, Asian-Americans, Arab-Americans and even Jews who, because of Koch's Likud-like hysterics, have been shut out of his cultural camp. Jesse Jackson made that coalition strong and purposeful, and it gave the city a wonderful two weeks of solidarity, integration and hope that promised greater days to come.

Price Affixing

A recent decision by New York City's Department of Consumer Affairs punctured a cherished conceit of the art crowd. By requiring galleries to post the prices of their goods, the ruling defies the pretense that the exhibition of art is a social service exempt from ordinary commercial codes. Galleries are neither educational institutions nor houses of worship. They are retail outlets bent on making money.

The art lobby greeted the decision with the outrage of Protestant dissenters over the sale of indulgences. It was denounced as a bureaucratic intrusion upon contemplative experience and a sign of philistine ignorance. Hilton Kramer, whose *New Criterion* draws conspicuous revenue from galleries, rushed to *The New York Times* on March 20 with a sputtering jeremiad against the department's "really rotten idea" and a call for its repeal. Kramer's straw argument is as disingenuous as the rest of the press agentry behind supply-side aesthetics. The ruling has nothing to do with price tags. According to the department's general counsel, galleries can comply with the law simply by leaving a discreet price list on the receptionist's desk. It is a modest move toward countering galleries' entrenched resistance to selling work at a listed price on a first-come, first-served basis. They prefer to negotiate with proven players of the art game who can be relied on to promote their own collections and make strategic donations to major museums. Where a work is placed is part of a calculated business tactic, employed to increase the probability that dealers and collectors will make a future profit on their holdings. The favorite buyer is one whose very ownership influences the market—a Charles Saatchi or a member of the Museum of Modern Art's board of directors. What Kramer terms "esthetic revelation" is far less significant to the art world than who controls the art. The price list is a small effort to curtail dealers' choice.

Kramer complains that the ruling will "make money—and the consciousness of money—an even more important factor in the art world than it now is." All to the better. Our culture commissars, of which Kramer is one, have a stake in obscuring the *Realekonomik* that feeds the ideology of art. Despite the theatrics of high seriousness with which art is presented, and contrary to popular piety, the chief beneficiary of the exaltation of art is not the public. It is the network of rogue entrepreneurs (some, the artists themselves),

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critics, curators, collectors and assorted gurus who package art in the aura of the over-soul and market it as a transcendent source of values. When Kramer laments the ruling as "highly prejudicial to the interests of the art public," he is actually saying that a reminder of crass reality must not spoil the sublimities of myth. Behind Kramer's rhetoric of public interest lies loyalty to a belief system that exploits the public it claims to educate.

A price list is no bar to insider trading, behind-the-scenes brokering and price manipulation, marketing hype or speculative chutzpah. It is, however, a dent in extravagant pretensions.

MAUREEN MULLARKEY

Maureen Mullarkey is a painter who writes on art and culture.

Burying Chernobyl

Is the world a safer place since the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union? The accident on April 26, 1986, killed at least thirty-one persons (and may result in thousands of deaths in future years) and caused extensive damage to property as the released radioactive fallout made its way over most of Europe, and beyond.

The heavily criticized failure of the Soviet government to provide information about the disaster for nearly three days, together with the reticence in many affected countries to disseminate early and detailed information to the population, has heightened public mistrust of official statements on nuclear matters. As a result many governments, with great fanfare, have taken legal measures designed to strengthen international cooperation on nuclear problems.

Within six months of the accident, acting under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency (I.A.E.A.) in Vienna, sixty-two states negotiated and forty-nine signed two major international agreements: one convention on early notification of a nuclear accident and another on assistance in the case of a nuclear accident or radiological emergency. The I.A.E.A. secretariat is now considering a new international agreement to include liability for nuclear accidents.

By the usual standards of international law these developments are occurring at lightning speed. But examination of the conventions suggests that much of this governmental action is illusory, aimed at calming worried populations.

The notification convention adds little of substance to preexisting customary law. Its wording leaves it to the affected government to decide if an accident could have effects past its boundaries or could endanger lives. By that criterion, the Soviet Union probably would not have been required to notify its neighbors in the early days of the Chernobyl accident. This and other loopholes in the convention are widened by the absence of binding international standards on safe levels of radioactivity. As was pointed out by the Italian delegate to the I.A.E.A., there is no reason that governments should not be required to notify other governments or the I.A.E.A. of *all* nuclear incidents, whether or not they increase radioactivity levels.

Even more disturbing is the failure of the notification convention to require any government giving or receiving such information to make it available to those who really need it: members of the public. The convention establishes the framework for only an intergovernmental flow of information. But Chernobyl demonstrated the difficulties of obtaining early, clear and detailed facts about nuclear accidents from official bodies. Western governments, compelled to balance freedom of information with the protection of already vulnerable nuclear industries, have come down firmly in favor of reinforcing the administrative monopoly on nuclear data. Such paternalistic and undemocratic attitudes fuel wild speculation in the press, leading to sensational headlines such as those in some British and U.S. newspapers that claimed 2,000 people had died at Chernobyl. As Hans Blix, director general of the I.A.E.A., noted soon after the accident, "the Soviet reporting was late, meager but probably not untrue. The Western reporting was fast, massive and often misleading, notably in casualty figures. Can there not be anything in between?"

The issue of compensation for nuclear damage is a second area of concern. In the two years since the Chernobyl accident, not a single government has presented a formal, public claim to the Soviet Union for damages, despite the existence of clear principles of international law requiring the payment of compensation in such accidents. There are also solid precedents for such claims in international law.

Yet, when it comes to demanding compensation for an accident at a nuclear power plant, governments with active nuclear industries are reluctant to press the issue. They fear that such claims are likely to increase the cost of insurance coverage or make it harder to obtain, and as a result increase the costs of nuclear power, thus undermining the constantly reiterated claim that it is cheaper than other sources of energy. But the best, and some say the only, way to enforce safety standards is to compel operators to pay for all the damage they might cause.

Governments find themselves treading a thin line. On the one hand, they need to reassure the public that nuclear power is safe and that they are acting swiftly to improve safety measures. On the other, they do not want to do anything that might adversely affect their already severely weakened nuclear power industries. The international legal process, of which states are the masters and not the servants, has provided an ideal way to give the impression that corrective steps are being taken. International nuclear cooperation may have improved since 1986, but are we really any safer?

PHILIPPE SANDS

Philippe Sands is the author of Chernobyl: Law and Communication, *published this month by Grotius Press.*

C.I.A. Veil

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

tales about flying weapons to the *contras* (specifically, to the Costa Rican spread of the C.I.A.-connected rancher John Hull) and picking up cocaine. Kerry has also played videotaped depositions of three former *contra* leaders of the Southern Front, whose statements confirm that drug money

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helped some rebel forces and that, at the least, some *contras* assisted some drug runners. Karol Prado, the front's second in command, said the rebels provided fuel to pilots carrying drugs who landed at *contra* airstrips.

On the *contras*-and-drugs tie, Kerry has not yet broken substantial new ground. Morales and Betzner, for instance, first told their stories almost two years ago. More hearings lie ahead, and Kerry maintains he has only been laying a foundation. His challenge is to corroborate the accounts of the drug dealers—admittedly, convicted criminals—and to determine the degree to which U.S. officials, including those in the C.I.A., knew of or participated in the *contra* drug connection. Poking around intelligence affairs is not an easy task for a lone Foreign Relations subcommittee chair, who must fret over jurisdictional and political concerns. "The issue," says one Senate aide, "is how Kerry can get the maximum amount of information out without generating a political reaction that will cause everything to end up with the Intelligence Committee and closed hearings." In addition, Kerry is not free to disclose classified operations. To do so would jeopardize his own security clearance and invite the wrath of fellow senators and the intelligence community, thus endangering his entire investigation.

Kerry is engaged in a delicate balancing act, which, seen from the outside, can be quite frustrating. For instance, Morales claimed he was told by the rebels that he was engaged in a C.I.A. operation. And Octaviano Cesar, a former *contra* tied to the agency, testified that he was informed that the C.I.A. and U.S. military officials said it was O.K. to work with Morales "as long as we don't deal with the powder." Well, precisely who told Cesar that? On the videotaped deposition, Kerry doesn't ask.

Consider how Kerry hit the C.I.A. wall in examining Palmer. Palmer said the State Department had found him through the Yellow Pages, but more seems to have been involved. At the press table, it was widely expected that ambassador Robert Duemling of the State Department would tell the subcommittee that the C.I.A. had proposed Vortex for the supply effort. Duemling's testimony, however, was postponed. Although Kerry would not name the company that obtained Vortex's DC-6, his staff produced a chart showing that four months after Vortex sold the plane it was registered to Universal Air Equipment. Universal Air, according to Florida corporate records, is based at the same address as Vortex. Its director is listed as Jaime Orellana, who worked for Vortex. If Universal Air is the unmentionable company, then it is presumably C.I.A.-connected. If so, Vortex is suspect as well. (Contacted in Miami, Vortex president Alberto Herreros refused to comment.) Palmer also noted that Vortex worked for another unnamed U.S. company, which Kerry referred to as a C.I.A. proprietary.

It's complicated, but the general picture emerges of a drug runner, Palmer, associated with C.I.A.-related firms, and who received, apparently at the agency's urging, a State Department contract to aid the *contras*. "It wasn't just Vortex," Kerry noted. "Other companies intertwined in *contras* and drugs were also suggested to the State Department by the same entity that recommended Vortex." Kerry said he could not identify these firms or the "entity" that suggested them. But read between the lines.

Then there's the testimony of Ramon Milian-Rodriguez, the convicted money launderer for the Medellín cartel. In two public appearances, he described the ins and outs of washing cash, e.g., how to pack $100 bills for bulk shipping. He claimed he passed cartel drug profits to the *contras*. (In a private session with the subcommittee last June, Milian-Rodriguez reportedly testified that he funneled almost $10 million to the rebels through Felix Rodriguez, the former C.I.A. agent with close ties to George Bush.) Kerry released a page from Milian-Rodriguez's ledger, which supposedly indicates he kept an account related to the C.I.A. Kerry has not explored publicly Milian-Rodriguez's claims and possible C.I.A. link, but he has promised to do so in future hearings.

Another potential C.I.A. angle that needs further exploration is the Harari network. According to ex-Noriega aide José Blandon, Michael Harari, a former Israeli general close to Mossad and a top adviser to Noriega, managed a network of U.S., Israeli and Panamanian citizens between 1982 and 1986 who used airstrips throughout Central America to arm the *contras* and smuggle drugs. (ABC News recently interviewed an American pilot who said he was part of this outfit and had brought drugs back to the United States.) The question is, Did the C.I.A. know about or become involved in the operation? Could Harari run such a scheme without Langley's blessing? Kerry said that the subcommittee would pursue the matter behind closed doors.

Kerry would be of great service if he could sort out the C.I.A.'s role in all this, but to do so he has to navigate carefully the various political shoals—and he's sailing alone. No other Democratic member of the Foreign Relations Committee has appeared at any of the hearings, and several Democratic staff members say Kerry's peers, having seen no smoking gun, are skeptical of his inquiry. At the same time, they have their fingers crossed. Rumors are afloat that Kerry possesses information damaging to Bush. When Blandon testified earlier this month that Noriega boasts of holding information that "could affect the elections of the United States," Kerry asked if Noriega does have material that could embarrass the Administration. Blandon replied, "Yes, indeed." Again, Kerry didn't request details.

The hearings have given Kerry an easy opportunity to sound off against the scourge of drugs and to assail President Reagan's ineffective and hypocritical interdiction efforts. But they also offer proof of the general inadequacy of Congressional oversight of intelligence matters. A public probe of the *contra* drug connection and possible C.I.A. involvement should not have occurred only at the insistence of a single crusading senator who has to tiptoe around assorted land mines. Still, the immediate question remains, What has Kerry discovered? One Kerry aide asks that judgment be withheld until the investigation is finished, in four to seven months. Kerry pledges that his inquiry is dedicated to "letting the chips fall where they may." Capitol Hill (as well as presidential candidates) is waiting to see what chips he will be able to produce.

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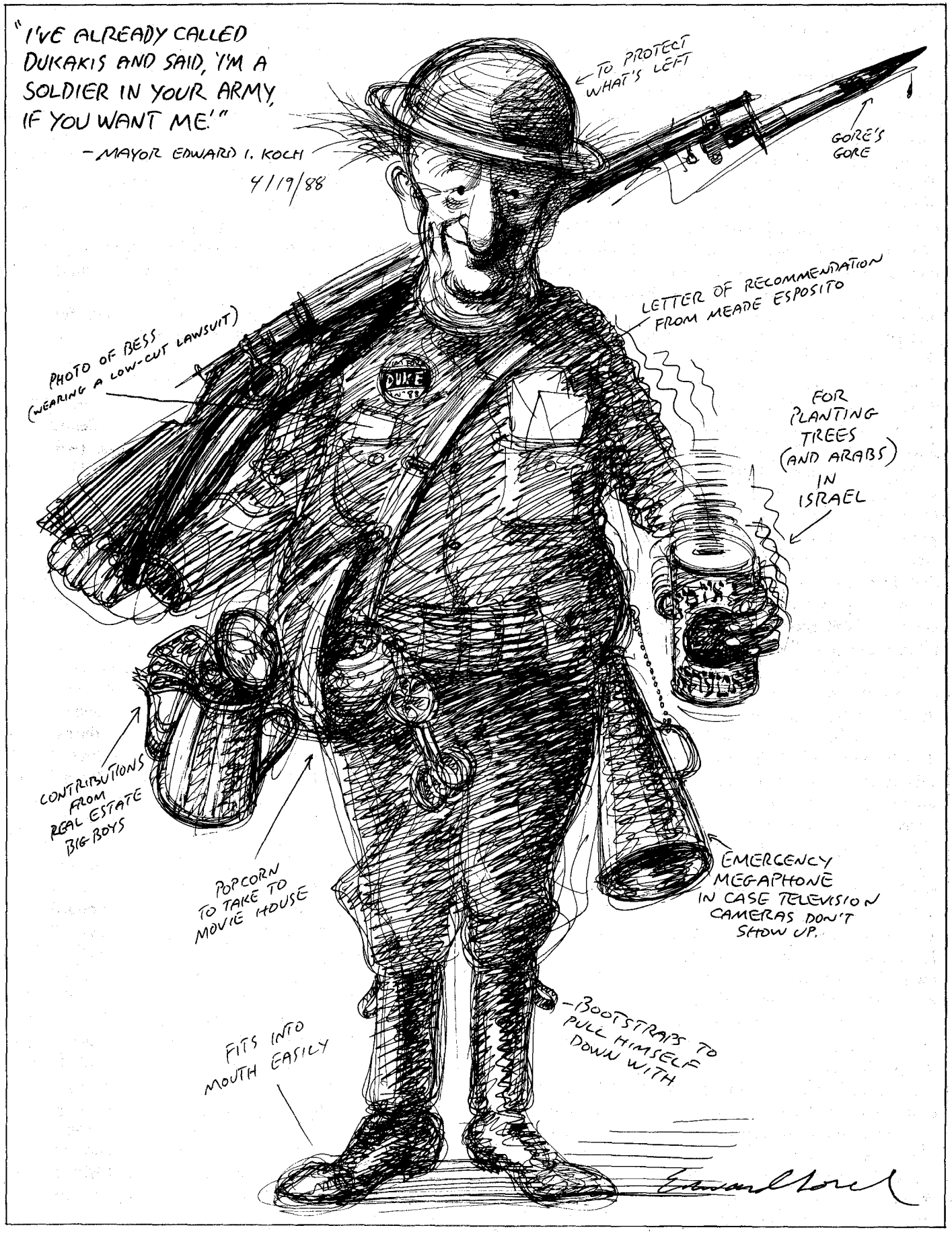
EDWARD SOREL


"I'VE ALREADY CALLED DUKAKIS AND SAID, 'I'M A SOLDIER IN YOUR ARMY, IF YOU WANT ME.'"
–MAYOR EDWARD I. KOCH
4/19/88
TO PROTECT WHAT'S LEFT
GORE'S GORE
LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION FROM MEADE ESPOSITO
PHOTO OF BESS (WEARING A LOW-CUT LAWSUIT)
FOR PLANTING TREES (AND ARABS) IN ISRAEL
CONTRIBUTIONS FROM REAL ESTATE BIG BOYS
POPCORN TO TAKE TO MOVIE HOUSE
EMERGENCY MEGAPHONE IN CASE TELEVISION CAMERAS DON'T SHOW UP.
BOOTSTRAPS TO PULL HIMSELF DOWN WITH
FITS INTO MOUTH EASILY

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MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Sam Donaldson's discovery and release of a White House scheduling memorandum for a day in the useless life of Ronald Reagan, and Larry Speakes's revelation about his cheap fabrication of "quotes," have prompted still more comment about the inanition and want of detail that supposedly impair the President. Of course, it is true that Reagan is neither physically nor mentally fit for the meanest office. But those who merely laugh at his lapses and deplore his sloth are missing the point. There have been numerous occasions when he has, after prolonged rehearsal with his handlers, given us considered statements. Long after the "clarification" department has done its Augean work on the following day, these statements remain on the record. One such was made at a press conference on February 24. On the situation in South Africa, Reagan said:

> We have a great division even among the people who are being oppressed. It is a tribal policy more than it is a racial policy, and that is one of the most difficult parts here.

He actually said this. That is the thing to keep your eye on. It was not a slip. It was not a miscue. It has not been "clarified" or retracted. It represents something continuous in Ronald Reagan's political career: moral and political solidarity with the white supremacist system in South Africa.

You may see this solidarity at work if you look at the strangely neglected instance of Namibia, toward which the Administration has simply adopted the South African line and tried to promulgate it in the international forum. Before 1980 all the Western countries acknowledged that the "problem" of Namibia was entirely a problem of South Africa's illegal occupation of the territory. A "contact group" set up by the United States, Canada, Britain, France and West Germany had succeeded in getting even the South Africans to agree to the principle of independence and had convened a conference to discuss it under U.N. auspices. In his memoirs the U.N. Deputy Secretary General at the time, Brian Urquhart, lays out the progress of the talks and notes rather bitterly that with the accession of the Reaganites, "the pressure went out of the enterprise." Under the new heading "constructive engagement," the South African occupation of Namibia was made subject to a "linkage" with the presence of Cuban forces in Angola.

Here is a good test of Reagan's distinction between racism and tribalism. The South Africans have occupied Namibia since 1920, and their occupation was finally declared illegal by both the United Nations and the World Court in 1966. Even at that late stage, Angola was still a Portuguese colony.

In Namibia, South Africa has perpetuated the system, which it inherited from the former German colonial regime, of playing one African tribe off against another in order to keep the white tribe in power. While Namibia was part of the German empire this practice was refined to an unusual degree. When I visited the country a few years ago, I was impressed to find that the main street of the capital city, Windhoek, was still called Kaiserstrasse. I was even more impressed to find that one of the chief side roads was called Goeringstrasse. The old brute actually came from a German colonial family there, and the brown shirts in which the early Nazi shock troops were kitted out were in fact German army surplus uniforms bought as a job lot from the same place.

In 1904, when Namibia was officially called German South-West Africa, the Herero tribe rose in revolt. The military commander, General von Trotha, announced, "I believe that the Herero must be destroyed as a nation." And he issued this order:

> Inside German territory every Herero tribesman, armed or unarmed, with or without cattle, will be shot. No women and children will be allowed in the territory; they will be driven back to their people or fired on. These are the last words to the Herero nation.

The official report on the pacification later stated:

> This bold enterprise shows up in the most brilliant light the ruthless energy of the German command in pursuing their beaten enemy. No pains, no sacrifice was spared. . . . Like a wounded beast, the enemy was tracked down from one water-hole to the next. The arid Omaheke desert was to complete what the German army had begun: the extermination of the Herero nation.

This may have been the first extermination order issued in this century, and I suppose you could say that it was as much tribal as racial. But that was not, I think, the point that Ronald Reagan was striving to make. Tribalism in Namibia has always been a weapon of the occupier. With the near-extinction of the Herero, the dominant population of the country became the Ovambo, out of whose national liberation movement came Swapo, the South-West Africa People's Organization. Swapo would easily win any election held in today's Namibia, and the apartheid authorities have worked unceasingly to try to split its supporters along tribal lines—even having the gall to warn the now-minority Herero against "Ovambo domination."

This state of affairs predates the arrival of the Cubans to Angola by many decades and would long outlive their departure if the Pretoria regime had any say in the matter. That it does have a say in the matter is the responsibility of the Reagan Administration, which has accepted the conceptual universe of the colonizers. Not a whimper has come from Washington, these past eight years, about the use of scorched-earth measures against Swapo guerrillas, who are in fact and in law fighting to establish the writ of the United Nations in their own country. Instead, there has been a surreptitious flow of support to Jonas Savimbi, who really is a tribalist, and in the pay of South Africa to boot. As it turns out, tribalism and racism are junior and senior partners in this matter, and as long as Ronald Reagan has anything to do with it, Washington will be the active patron of both.

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ARTICLES.

BRAZIL ON THE BRINK

Land, Debt And Democracy

LINDA RABBEN

As the civilian government of President José Sarney stumbles from one crisis to the next, state repression in Brazil is taking increasingly violent forms, with soldiers and military police being used to break strikes and put down nonviolent demonstrations. Troops ended the recent strike of railroad employees in Rio de Janeiro at gunpoint, reportedly killing sixteen people.

Last December 29, in what may have been Brazil's worst massacre of the twentieth century, military police opened fire on about 3,000 unarmed demonstrators who were occupying a bridge over the Tocantins River at Marabá, in the northern state of Pará. Scores of gold miners, their families and bystanders were shot to death, wounded or drowned after jumping off the bridge into the river seventy meters below. According to local press reports and church publications, the state troopers acted on direct orders from Pará's Governor, Helio Gueiros, with the approval of the federal Justice Minister, Paulo Brossard. The massacre occurred while representatives of the miners were negotiating with federal officials for safer working conditions at Serra Pelada, the giant open-pit gold mine near Marabá.

More than 40,000 miners work at Serra Pelada, often digging with their bare hands and living in nearby camps under the most primitive conditions. The federal government has repeatedly announced plans to automate mining there and relocate the workers to "agricultural zones"; the miners threatened civil war if the plan went ahead.

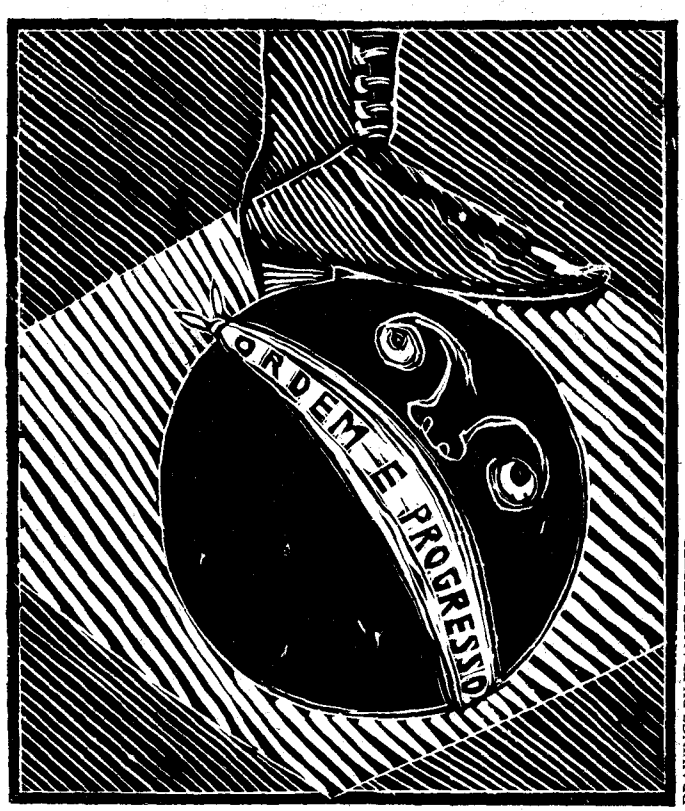
Estimates of the casualties in the December massacre vary widely. The military police claim only two people were killed, "by accident," while church sources give a total of 133 dead or missing. Local journalists reported that the military police combed the tributaries and backwaters of the Tocantins, spiriting away victims' bodies and threatening to kill witnesses if they talked. President Sarney, who is a political ally of Governor Gueiros, has kept silent about the incident, while Justice Minister Brossard has refused to initiate a government inquiry. Gueiros says he is proud of his order to open fire; in one interview, rejecting criticisms, he compared himself to a crucified Christ. Meanwhile, federal deputies from the Workers' Party have conducted their own inquiry, and trade union leaders, left-wing politicians and human rights advocates have launched an independent investigation.

The massacre took place in the Parrot's Beak region, on the edge of Amazonia, where rural labor and land conflicts are acute. Besides miners, hundreds of landless peasants, homesteaders and their advocates (priests, nuns, lawyers, union organizers and pastoral agents) have been killed in the past two years. The assailant is usually a gunman hired by land grabbers, and in many cases local and military police have backed the violence or even taken part in it. In only one case have the killers been brought to justice.

Rural violence in that part of northern Brazil made national headlines in 1986, when a popular priest was gunned down at high noon in the church square of the town of Imperatriz. Justice Minister Brossard responded with a much publicized "disarmament campaign," but the only ones disarmed by the federal police were peasants, whose machetes and old-fashioned hunting rifles were confiscated. The hired guns and private militias continue to operate without hindrance, and some areas of the north are in a virtual state of war.

Although it constitutes almost half of Brazil, Amazonia is far from the population and economic centers of the southeast. To city dwellers, preoccupied with the everyday violence around them, the rural killings seem remote. Millions have fled the land during the past generation and are more concerned with their daily urban survival than with the faraway, abstract problems of the landless peasants, who make up only 10 percent of the population. Seventy percent of Brazilians now live in cities.

Exploitation of Amazonia's wealth, both above and below the surface, has only just begun. Every day, 2 million



DRAWINGS BY FRANCES JETTER

Linda Rabben is a staff member of the Washington-based Brazil Network, an organization of U.S. nonprofit groups and individuals.

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trees go down; thousands of miners strip the earth of gold, iron and other minerals. Domestic and international mining companies are gearing up to follow the military into remote areas under the Calha Norte ("Northern Headwaters") program, which will open up the far north to garrisons and developers. The roots of the violence, according to Fr. Ricardo Rezende, a church activist in the extremely tense area of Conceição do Araguaia, lie in the government's economic plans for the Amazon, which encourage the concentration of wealth and land ownership. Officially sanctioned repression of rural people, he maintains, "has an instructive intention. To kill isn't enough; they also want to terrorize those who survive. It isn't indiscriminate."

The Catholic Church's vocal opposition to Calha Norte and other policies that affect indigenous peoples has earned it many enemies in official circles. Last August, *O Estado de São Paulo*, one of Brazil's largest and most important newspapers, launched a campaign against the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI), the Pastoral Land Commission and international church groups, accusing them of conspiring with the international tin cartel to stop Brazilian companies from mining cassiterite in indigenous areas. The paper claimed that this conspiracy aims at nothing less than the establishment of independent indigenous states and the breakup of Brazil as a sovereign nation. In an angry response to letters about rural violence from members of Amnesty International, the Justice Minister repeated charges from the *Estado* articles and accused 47,000 Austrian schoolchildren, who had petitioned the Constituent Assembly to protect indigenous lands, of "proposing to reduce national sovereignty . . . over the riches of the subsoil."

The church declared that CIMI documents cited in the articles were forgeries and threatened to sue the paper. But the *Estado* campaign allowed various sectors of the business, political and intelligence communities to mobilize and unite. According to the National Intelligence Service (the S.N.I.), church activities in defense of Indians and homesteaders threaten social peace, national security and democracy. An S.N.I. report proposes expelling some foreign priests and bishops and barring foreign organizations from financing Brazilian religious institutions.

Soon after the *Estado* campaign began, the national Constituent Assembly put provisions in a draft Constitution that would downgrade the legal status of indigenes from "relatively" to "absolutely" incapable, grant the government the power to take land from native groups it defines as "acculturated," and open up indigenous areas to private mining companies. Indians who have been forced to flee white encroachment could lose their lands if they have not occupied them "since time immemorial" or at least since 1934. Displacement of indigenous groups has been so extensive, in fact, that hardly any would qualify.

The Constituent Assembly is composed predominantly of wealthy landowners. Justice Minister Brossard owns thousands of acres in his home state; so does President Sarney. Small wonder, then, that Indians living on exploitable acreage are so vulnerable or that the government's

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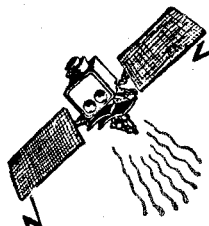
agrarian reform law, announced in 1985, should have expropriated and redistributed only about 5 percent of targeted land. In two and a half years, three agrarian reform ministers have come and gone, two resigning because they could not fulfill their mandate, the third dying in a plane crash. The law makes expropriation so complex and easily litigable that it was virtually doomed from the start.

According to political scientists Frances Hagopian and Scott Mainwaring, it was pressure from São Paulo land speculators (whose holdings extend throughout Brazil) that led the government to water down the reform law. And powerful landowner interests, represented by the Rural Democratic Union, a rapidly growing far-right group with a reputation for violence, have fought hard to insure that the new Constitution will not promote agrarian reform either. Without it, less than 5 percent of the landholders will continue to control more than two-thirds of Brazil's cultivable land.

Although Brazilians can now vote in "free" elections, meaningful democracy remains a utopian dream, and the outlook for the country's much-heralded transition is bleak. The military kept control of the country's political apparatus until the very last moment before the civilian president took office and still wields considerable influence over the civilian regime. Six of the twenty-six Cabinet ministers are military men, and they are the main prop behind the weak and ineffectual Sarney. The government has also kept many of the armed forces' authoritarian laws and procedures on the books. It continues to enact decree laws over the heads of the Congress (which also functions as the country's Constituent Assembly). The budget, too, is not subject to Congressional oversight. The emergency economic measures of the past two years have been framed in secret by ministers and their advisers and reviewed only by the country's economic and political elite.

Former supporters of the military dictatorship (including Sarney) continue in power. An amnesty law guarantees that no member of the armed forces will be punished for torture or other human rights violations that occurred during the dictatorship, and torture remains a common weapon against criminals. Retired military officers still control vital state-owned companies and federal agencies, such as the Special Informatics Secretariat, whose refusal to allow Microsoft computer software into Brazil triggered U.S. trade sanctions last November.

For the past six years, Brazil has been paying the price for the economic transformations brought about by the country's military rulers. After they took power in 1964, they implemented huge development projects with stacks of borrowed money obligingly supplied by foreign banks and multilateral lending institutions. These Pharaonic undertakings—dams, power plants, highways, weapons factories—helped transform Brazil from an agrarian society into the world's eighth-largest capitalist economy. The consequence for today's civilian politicians is a crippling debt that has left Brazil a slave of the banks and the International Monetary Fund. A monumental (and desperate) export drive helped pay the interest, to the tune of about $11 billion a year,



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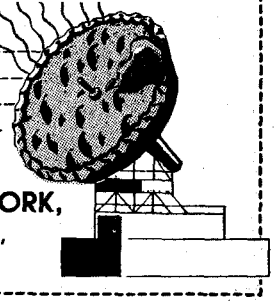

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while domestic consumption fell by about 25 percent between 1982 and 1987. One result is that two-thirds of Brazilians are now said to be malnourished.

When the government tried economic shock therapy in 1986, exports fell and domestic consumption zoomed—thus, the interest moratorium announced in February 1987. But the attempt to rebel against debt servitude was futile. In February, Brazil agreed to return to the I.M.F. and ended the moratorium with a $350 million payment. The new Finance Minister, Maílson Nóbrega, is quietly negotiating with the creditor banks for bailouts.

The national debt casts its shadow on all aspects of Brazilian life. Why do the government's economic policies encourage concentration of wealth and land ownership (and consequently incite land conflicts) in the Amazon and other areas? Because agro-industrialists can produce for export, and the money they earn pays interest on the debt. Big government subsidies and tax write-offs encourage land speculation and turn even unproductive projects into sure moneymakers.

Landowners and other elite groups wield considerable power in the Constituent Assembly, and political parties are so weak institutionally that they can do little to resist. Organized around charismatic leaders who perpetuate their control through clientage, most of the parties have no ideological position except the continuation of what Brazilians call "the political game." With grass-roots groups and the poor majority mostly shut out, there is little genuine participatory democracy, either in the assembly or in local government. Socialist and social-democratic parties are weak and small. The only hope for change seems to lie in the burgeoning grass-roots groups, from Christian base communities to mothers' clubs and neighborhood residents' associations, which operate mostly outside the formal political arena. These groups work on local problems, organizing self-help projects and pressuring authorities to provide for services such as sewers, electricity, trash collection and clinics. Some have participated in urban and rural land occupations or demonstrated in support of land reform.

Since the civilian regime came to office in 1985, Brazilians have gone from euphoria to depression to disillusionment, in an eerily familiar cycle. Brazilian political, social and economic patterns are very old and not easily dislodged. This is, after all, a 500-year-old country that ended slavery only a century ago this May, that has wiped out millions of indigenes and despoiled region after region to export one natural resource after another. The speed of exploitation, deforestation and oppression seems to have accelerated, but the dilemmas remain constant.

Brazil's destiny is still not its own to determine. Whether the outsiders be Portuguese grandees or New York bankers, English merchants or I.M.F. officials, they cast the same long shadows. Even if the Brazilian elites were solidly committed to improving the lot of the vast majority of their compatriots (or at least to expanding domestic markets), the sword of debt would still hang over them. How to get out from under it and still preserve their privileges and control? That is their problem now, as always. It has nothing to do

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with extending democracy and everything to do with trying to vitiate it. Given their interests, it would be naïve to expect the elites to act otherwise.

The elites' politicians will soon decide, in the Constituent Assembly, whether to give José Sarney another year's lease on political power. If they should vote no, Brazilians will vote in a direct presidential election this November, for the first time in twenty-eight years. But from week to week, the factions keep shifting. As one Brazilian put it, "Anything can happen." Anything, that is, except instant democracy. □

DESTRUCTIVE 'DEVELOPMENT'

Financing Ecocide In the Third World

SUSAN GEORGE

Susan George's forthcoming book, A Fate Worse Than Debt *(due this month from Grove Press), is about the Third World debt crisis and the opportunities for making debt an instrument of productivity and democracy. This article is adapted from one chapter of the book.*

Indebted countries have not just borrowed money; they have borrowed the future. Nature puts up the collateral. The environment is perhaps an unexpected victim of the debt crisis in the Third World, but one day we shall all pay for the damage this crisis does to ecosystems.

Many neoclassical economists still flatly deny even the theoretical possibility of limits to growth and refuse the notion that pollution and environmental destruction should figure in their equations. Anything difficult to quantify simply gets left out. Since the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are peopled with neoclassical economists, it is not surprising that their loans and adjustment programs pay scant attention to ecological costs. It will be a long time before anyone can fully estimate exactly what those are—and by then it may well be too late. But there is already enough evidence to show clearly that the present road is not only wrong but stupid, even in economic terms. The price of cleaning up the mess now being made in the Third World will be horrendous, and it can only add to the present debt bill.

There are two debt/environment connections. The first is borrowing to finance ecologically destructive projects. The second is paying for those—and all the other elements of debt-financed "modernization"—by cashing in natural resources. Many of the grandiose projects that helped to put Third World countries on the debt treadmill are also environmental disasters, ones encouraged and financed by major development institutions like the World Bank. Huge undertakings such as large dams and other hydro-projects are part of the standard development model, paying no heed to future penalties for present recklessness.

For example, the Tucurui dam in Brazil's Amazonia, begun in 1976, is expected to cost at least $8 billion by the time it is completed. That figure does not reflect its true cost, merely that of the cement, steel, labor, etc., required to build it. Real cost includes losses of silt and fertility downstream, flooding of agricultural land and forests, destruction of wildlife, increased salinization of soils. Those are just a few of the physical effects—which have, of course, an immediate impact on people and their livelihoods.

People are hit directly by diseases (malaria, schistosomiasis, river blindness) that proliferate when water patterns are disturbed. They are also, sometimes forcibly, uprooted from their homes. Bruce Rich, former senior attorney of the U.S. Natural Resources Defense Council and now of the Environmental Defense Fund, claims that a 1984 World Bank internal document says, "[Large-scale hydroelectric and irrigation] projects approved by the World Bank in the period 1979–83 resulted in the involuntary resettlement of at least 400,000 to 450,000 people on four continents." One should add that "resettlement" is often an optimistic term, since many of those uprooted are simply left to fend for themselves without compensation.

The World Bank has been a major bulwark of Brazil's electric power program. By 1974, it had already made twenty-six loans to this industrial sector; in 1985-86 alone, bank energy-related lending to Brazil totaled more than $1.3 billion. The Tucurui dam is one of Brazil's many hydro-proj-

Susan George is a senior fellow of the Transnational Institute, the international branch of the Institute for Policy Studies. She lives outside Paris and is the author of How the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger *(Penguin).*

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ects supported by the bank. It has flooded 216,000 hectares of forest land. Eletronorte, the government company in charge, was in a hurry. Instead of clearing the forest, it left 13.4 million cubic meters of hardwood, from some 2.8 million trees, to rot under water, after having paid a private subcontractor to spray the forest cover with the infamous Agent Orange (containing dioxin), the devastating effects of which have been well known since the Vietnam War.

Some forty people are alleged to have died from the defoliant. The victims' families are unlikely to receive compensation, but even that is not the end of the story. According to *The Economist*'s monthly Development Report, "It seems a number of full drums of Agent Orange were never removed from the forest, and now nobody knows where they are. . . . They could easily burst under the pressure of water in the dam. The dam straddles the major water supply for the state capital of Belém, home to 1.2 million people."

A World Bank staff member who carried out an environmental assessment of the Tucurui project did not mention Agent Orange in a short description published in 1986; he did state, however, that Tucurui "entails the resettlement of five thousand non-Amerindian families, up to 30,000 people." Land previously owned by Indians in the region has already been significantly decreased by flooding, transmission lines and a highway.

People are uprooted for purposes other than building dams. Indeed, ecological destruction seems wedded to contempt for ethnic minorities and for the basic needs of poor people. The best (or rather, worst) contemporary examples are provided by internal migration programs, the government-decreed resettlement schemes to move substantial numbers of citizens someplace deemed more suitable. Both Brazil and Indonesia, among the largest debtors in the world, have instituted costly programs with the help of bilateral aid, multilateral development banks and the World Bank. *The Ecologist*, a British magazine that consistently offers exhaustively researched articles on environmental questions, devoted an entire issue to Transmigrasi, the Indonesian Transmigration Program, in 1986.

In the initial, grandiose conception, Transmigrasi was intended to move nearly 70 million people from the "overcrowded" islands of Bali and Java to the so-called outer islands—Sumatra, Sulawesi, Kalimantan (formerly Borneo), Irian Jaya and others—over a twenty-year period. Mercifully, this plan has been dramatically scaled back; Indonesia simply hasn't enough money to carry it out. Even so, by 1984, more than 3.6 million Indonesians had been moved, and the government seems to be shooting for a quarter to a third of its initial goal. Some 20 million people might ultimately be displaced.

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The Transmigrasi budget for the five-year plan to 1989 is $3.5 billion. Indonesia's outstanding debt stood at $32.5 billion in 1984, making it the world's sixth most indebted nation. Transmigrasi absorbs about 6 percent of national spending. In 1985, the World Bank made its largest-ever loan to the program ($160 million), bringing its commitment since 1974 to over a half-billion dollars. As of June 1985, total foreign funding for the resettlement project, including substantial contributions from the Asian Development Bank, the United States, West Germany and Holland, amounted to nearly $800 million, with $750 million more already in the pipeline.

The World Bank's rationale for this lending is that Transmigrasi will reduce population growth and soil erosion on Java, take advantage of unused or underused land on the outer islands and create 200,000 jobs a year. Supporters of the program stress that it gives poor, landless families a once-in-a-lifetime chance to own their own plots while improving living standards for the original inhabitants of the outer islands by its spillover effects. *The Ecologist*'s contributors demolish these claims and add evidence of gross abuse of both nature and human rights.

Theoretically, the settlers are supposed to receive a plot of cleared land, food aid and agricultural inputs. In reality, *The Ecologist* reports,

> because of the lack of uninhabited land suitable for agriculture, most of the locations chosen are tropical rainforests. The forests have been cleared by private contractors . . . whose only concern is to complete the job as quickly and as profitably as possible. In many cases, only the commercially attractive trees have been felled, with large tree stumps being left behind. The transmigrants, who are moved in as soon as possible (often long before site preparation is completed), have not been able to finish the land clearance operations themselves.

Heavy machinery used for clearing land in the Transmigrasi program compacts and damages the soil; the promised houses are often not built, nor are roads or other infrastructure in place. Reports compiled from Indonesian newspapers and other sources indicate that the land is not suitable for growing most crops—certainly not rice, which is what Javanese settlers know best how to grow. What they do manage to grow may be eaten by rats and wild boar. Some settlers live close to starvation and in constant fear of the elephants and tigers that surround them, animals disturbed in their own natural habitats by the land clearing. The *Jakarta Post* reported in 1985 that on one site, in which 1,000 families had been settled, only twelve remained. They had been promised two hectares each, but received at most a quarter of a hectare, not enough for even bare subsistence.

Nicholas Guppy, who has been studying tropical rain forests for thirty-five years, explains concisely the ecological havoc wreaked by this program: "Visiting [cleared] areas, it is hard to view without emotion the miles of devastated trees, of felled, broken and burned trunks, of branches, mud, and bark crisscrossed with tractor trails—especially when one realizes that in most cases nothing of comparable value will grow again on the area. Such sights are reminis-

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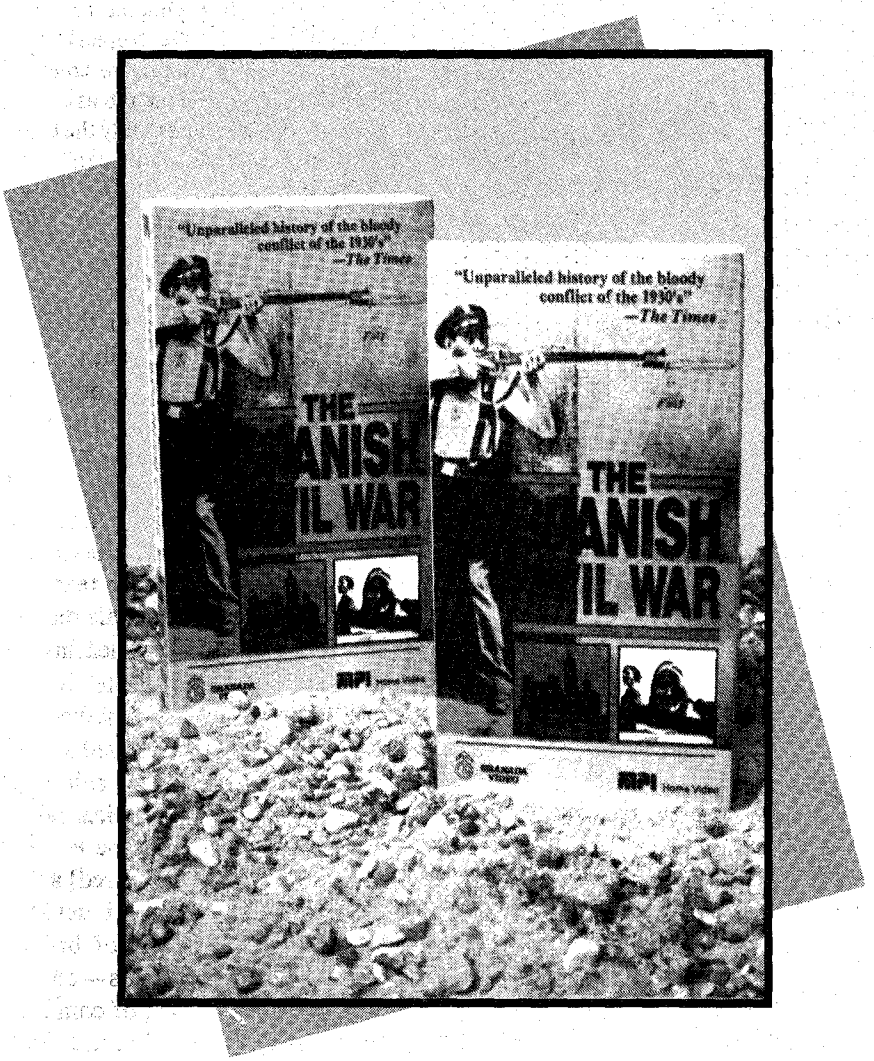

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cent of photographs of Hiroshima. . . . ***Indonesia might be regarded as waging the equivalent of thermonuclear war upon [its] own territories.***" [Emphasis added.]

In the course of all this devastation, the needs of the inhabitants of Indonesia's outer islands are swept aside, for the government sees tribal people as obstacles—"isolated and alien" is the official phrase. A national law makes quite clear that "the rights of traditional-law communities may not be allowed to stand in the way of the establishment of Transmigration settlements." The government also wants to regroup these people and subject them to the central administration they have hitherto largely escaped, using them as labor on cash-crop plantations. Since 1985, the Indonesian Army has been given a key role in enforcing Transmigrasi. Meanwhile, the objectives of the Department of Social Affairs with regard to tribal people include: "Developing a state of monotheistic religion . . . by eliminating animistic traits. Developing their awareness and understanding of State and Government. Raising their capacity for rational and dynamic thinking. Developing and nurturing aesthetic concepts and values . . . (so that they may) produce works of art and culture in tune with the values of Indonesian society." Any responsible anthropologist would readily characterize such attitudes and actions toward tribal people as ethnocide.

The World Bank has any number of internal directives and guidelines concerning the proper treatment of migrants, ethnic minorities and the environment. Clearly, in the case of Transmigrasi, it is systematically flouting all of them. Some of the Bank's officials have expressed serious reservations about the program in draft reports, which are invariably rewritten and watered down in final versions, partly to satisfy the demands of the Indonesian government and partly to justify the enormous sums already invested by the bank. The bank admits that after three five-year plans (and half of a fourth), "an overall assessment of the program is not feasible" because "detailed evaluations" are unavailable. As Carmel Budiardjo, a longtime campaigner for human rights in Indonesia, says, "This gives the impression of a juggernaut hurtling toward some unknown destination, with no one pausing to consider the consequences."

The contributions of huge foreign loans to environmental plunder, widespread impoverishment and ethnocide can no longer be denied. Numerous World Bank–sponsored ecological calamities are currently being perpetrated in Brazil—the Polonoreste project, for example, perhaps better described as the rape of Rondonia (a state in western Amazonia, on the Bolivian border), which at the present rate will deforest an area the size of Britain by the mid-1990s.

Farther east, the Grande Carajas iron ore project is said to be the world's largest single development scheme (the Tucurui dam is part of it and will provide electricity). Conceived by a Japanese team in 1980, Carajas will cost an estimated $62 billion and entail partial or total deforestation of an area larger than France and Britain put together. The European Community is contributing $600 million to the scheme. Carajas, with several billion tons of iron and half a dozen other mineral ore deposits, is described by the Brazilian

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government as a "national export project" and an answer to Brazil's crippling debt.

As of 1984, Indonesia owed $23 billion to public sources, plus $413 million to the I.M.F.; Brazil's publicly held debt was $66 billion and it owed the I.M.F. $4 billion. Thus, more than $93 billion in public money has been showered on those two countries alone. If taxpayers and World Bank bondholders in the creditor countries knew that they were indirectly financing ecocide, would the money flow so freely?

Ecologists in the United States are working to stem this flow and won major victories in 1985 and 1986, when Congress passed legislation aimed at forcing the multilateral development banks (M.D.B.s), including the World Bank, to walk a straight and narrow ecological path. Since the United States is the largest contributor to these banks, any restrictions it may impose upon them are of the greatest importance. Some of the major provisions of the legislation are:

§ that the U.S. Treasury Department "regularly raise" the question of M.D.B. progress in "improving their environmental performance."

§ that the U.S. Treasury and State Departments "propose formally" that each M.D.B. board "hold a special meeting within the next twelve months, focused specifically on environmental performance and better implementation of multilateral development policies designed to protect the environment and indigenous peoples."

§ that the U.S. Treasury and State Departments undertake "diplomatic and other initiatives" to "insure cooperative implementation of the reforms."

Further provisions stipulate inclusion of environmental reviews in the entire "project cycle" of the M.D.B.s, regular ecological monitoring, active involvement of health and environmental ministers in borrowing nations during all phases of planning and execution, and "rehabilitation and management of the ecological resources of borrower nations on a sustained basis." Most innovative of all, the M.D.B.s are supposed to accept the participation of nongovernmental environmental and indigenous peoples' organizations "at all stages of project planning."

Given the M.D.B.s' penchant for secrecy, the provision for participation by nongovernmental groups may be one of the most difficult to implement. The World Bank usually hides behind a real or purported demand for confidentiality on the part of the borrower. When environmentalist Bruce Rich asked the bank why it was financing a project that was causing "rampant deforestation, invasion of Indian areas and destruction of natural lands unsuitable for agriculture in Brazil," the bank initially replied that it was "not at liberty to discuss the details of the implementation of the Polonoreste project because they are part of our ongoing discussions with the Brazilian government. These discussions are of a confidential nature." Senator Robert Kasten Jr. then wrote to the president of the World Bank, complaining that the response was "a brushoff and an insult."

Money, fortunately, talks; and as Senator Kasten pointed out in his report that accompanied the 1986 legislation, "Funding for the M.D.B.s has been reduced because of their failure to address the Committee's critiques

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and proposals for reform." His colleague in the House, David Obey, made clear in his report that Congress is looking for real, substantial changes in policies and practices, "not just promises to do better."

So, the M.D.B.s may have to choose between opening their windows or closing their doors to significant funding. Congress recognizes, however, that it cannot force the necessary changes on a recalcitrant bank all by itself. The legislators hope that the requirement for diplomatic initiatives will cause other lending—and borrowing—nations to bring similar pressures to bear on the M.D.B.s and insist that environmental protection become part of their standard operating procedures. The U.S. legislation could serve as a model for Green activists in other countries. □

SUING A RUNAWAY COMPANY

The Workers Who Wouldn't Go Away

DAVID BENSMAN AND ROBERTA LYNCH

On March 28, 1980, 3,500 workers at the Wisconsin Steel mill in southeast Chicago went to work to find that it would be their last shift—their employer was bankrupt. Their last paychecks bounced, the bankruptcy court put their claims behind those of a long line of creditors, and then came the bitterest pill of all: International Harvester, which had owned the mill for seventy-five years, announced that, under the terms of an agreement signed by the president of the workers' independent union in 1977, the company was not liable for millions of dollars in severance pay and other benefits.

On February 11, eight years later, Navistar, as Harvester has since been renamed, finally accepted at least part of its responsibility to former mill employees by agreeing to a $15 million out-of-court settlement. The story of how these workers brought the corporation to account is inspiring.

The shutdown of Wisconsin Steel in 1980 found the Progressive Steelworkers Union, their independent local, headed by Tony Roque, woefully unprepared. Roque's power derived largely from his alliance with Chicago machine boss Edward Vrdolyak. But the bankruptcy exposed the limits of the machine's clout, and Roque and the Progressive Steelworkers Union faded from the scene.

Into the breach stepped Frank Lumpkin and a band of supporters drawn largely from a dissident caucus within the local, a group that for years had unsuccessfully urged an affiliation with the Steelworkers International union. Lumpkin's group, which named itself the Save Our Jobs Committee, struggled to keep the Wisconsin Steel workers united and to make sure that the public did not forget their plight.

To accomplish the first goal, Lumpkin registered the Save Our Jobs Committee as a food pantry and distributed free food to the laid-off steelworkers every two weeks; the food was handed out at the conclusion of meetings in which the Save Our Jobs leadership laid out its strategy and reinforced rank-and-file support. To keep steelworkers in the public eye, Lumpkin organized dozens of rallies, vigils, parades and press conferences. One memorable Thanksgiving, Save Our Jobs members demonstrated outside Mayor Jane Byrne's Gold Coast high-rise, reminding the Mayor and the citizens of Chicago that her election-eve promises to help the unemployed remained unfulfilled.

Ultimately, it was a lawsuit that forced Navistar to blink. In the summer of 1981, Frank Lumpkin had called on Tom Geoghegan, a young attorney in a small Chicago law firm. Geoghegan was not optimistic, but he took the case. His brief, filed in U.S. District Court in Chicago, argued that the agreement Roque signed with Harvester in 1977 was invalid for several reasons, among them that Roque never obtained formal ratification from the local union. Depositions in the suit revealed that Roque had not understood Harvester's legal obligations or the workers' rights under law.

Harvester's lawyers delayed the suit, resisting discovery motions, filing for dismissal, hoping to wear down the opposition. But Lumpkin and Geoghegan wouldn't give up. The more fortunate former Wisconsin Steel workers—those who found new jobs or had adequate pensions—contributed $5 or $10 bills to the legal defense fund. Lumpkin spearheaded a fund-raising effort that brought in thousands of dollars from Chicago's progressives, unionists and church social-justice activists. The steelworkers were encouraged in their uphill efforts when the Federal government's Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, which assumed a $44 million liability when the mill went into bankruptcy, filed a suit parallel to that of the Save Our Jobs Committee.

Finally, after District Court Judge James Moran made it clear that he would rule in favor of some of the committee's claims, Navistar agreed to the $15 million settlement, giving the steelworkers with high seniority most of what Harvester owed them when the mill closed. Almost every employee will get several thousand dollars.

The Wisconsin Steel story, on one level, is a tale of individual fortitude. On another level, the victory shows how much progress labor and community forces have made in the past decade. When the mill closed down, residents of the surrounding neighborhoods were simply bewildered. Today, workers in communities throughout America have had ten years' experience in dealing with shutdowns. There are plant-closing networks, experts in pension law, job retraining programs, feasibility studies and worker ownership options. Irate automobile workers in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and Norwood, Ohio, gained statewide support to hold Chrysler and General Motors responsible for the social impact of their announced closings of two assembly plants. The movement to hold corporations accountable for the social impact of their business decisions is gaining strength. □

David Bensman and Roberta Lynch are co-authors of Rusted Dreams: Hard Times in a Steel Community, *published last year by McGraw-Hill and soon to be released in a University of California paperback edition.*

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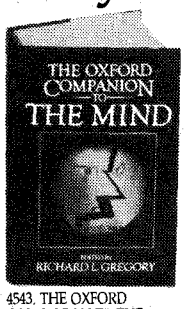

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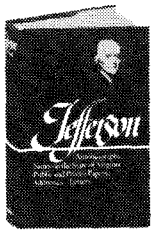

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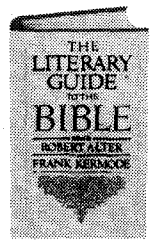

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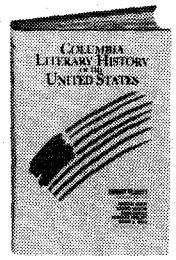

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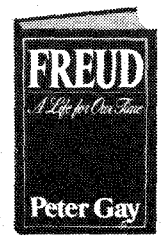

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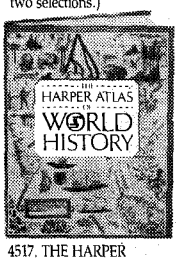

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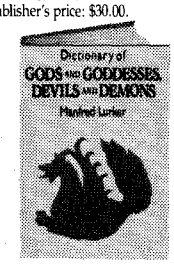

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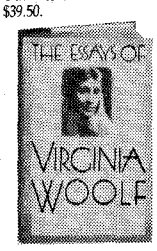

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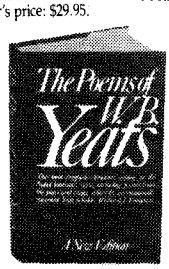

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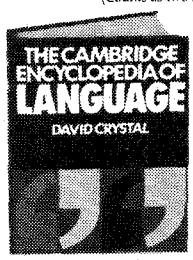

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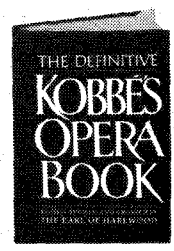

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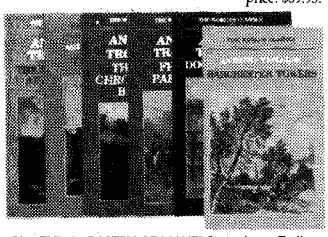

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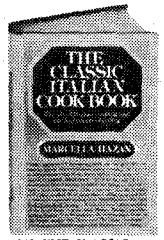

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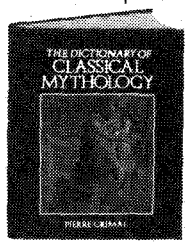

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EXCHANGE.

(*Continued From Page 590*)

or the *Utne Reader*?

Speaking of big bucks, I was more irritated by Sorel's satire last year of Bill Cosby for Cosby's endorsements, since Sorel promotes at least one big corporation himself. I remember that at a New York Public Library lecture Sorel was asked how he reconciled his illustrations for Manufacturers Hanover with his left political beliefs. He turned on his questioner, saying that when he became an illustrator it was a noble profession for the son of an immigrant to aspire to, whereas today middle-class children become illustrators when they're too lazy to be doctors or lawyers. The implication that if one's background is working-class any flirtation with wealth is excusable is a leniency Sorel doesn't allow his victims. But then, he probably hasn't made as much as Bill Cosby or Frances Lear. Surely those aren't sour grapes? *Lisa Blackshear*

Greenfield, Mass.

I like most of Jules Feiffer's and Ed Sorel's cartoons, and doubt I would like Frances Lear's probably classist magazine, but in the case of Sorel's attack on Lear, I think Feiffer is wrong ["Letters," March 19] and the *Nation* staff members who objected are right. Editorial judgment is constantly exercised about whether to accept or reject written pieces; why should cartoons be exempt? If Sorel had caricatured a male Jew who had decided to start his own magazine for Jewish men, depicting him as a grotesque, hook-nosed stereotype loaded with money, I suspect *The Nation* would not have printed it.

Women and other discriminated-against groups are still vulnerable, rich or not, and you don't pick on vulnerable people. Women over 40, especially those divorced or never married, do not have an easy time even in this "liberated" era, although it may be harder to empathize with them when they are cushioned by wealth and use their "husband's money." (But aren't husbands partners, and wouldn't the accumulation of so much wealth by liberal Norman Lear be a more appropriate target?) That Frances Lear should be publicly ridiculed because she is older, not left in poverty (as so many divorced women are) and has the chutzpah to start a magazine for women over 40 is more a comment on Sorel's (and *The Nation* editors') blind insensitivity than a blow for artistic freedom. *Ann Morrissett Davidon*

New York City

As a professional critic of the news media who frequently takes them to task in print for, among other sins, sexist messages spread, unwittingly and otherwise, through headlines, captions, commentary and reports, I confess to being somewhat mystified by the charge of sexism leveled at Edward Sorel's cartoon feature on Frances Lear. Maybe it would help if those thirty-four members of *The Nation*'s staff who protested its publication would specify just what it is about the piece that suggests a gender-related bias. The vanities of men—self-indulgence, self-glorification, self-delusion and the rest—get plenty of attention from Sorel. Surely women who exhibit similar tendencies are equally worthy targets.

Gloria Cooper
Columbia Journalism Review

Dayton, Ohio

The only word I could possibly use to describe my reaction to Sorel's cartoon "Enter Queen Lear, Triumphant" is shock. Not shock that this existed but that it was in *The Nation*. At the time, I was looking through a stack of publications that had piled up in my mailbox, and I literally looked to the front of the magazine to be sure I was looking at *The Nation*.

I join with your thirty-four staff members in their protest of the cartoon. And I wonder about the decision-making policies of a publication that would run something against the wishes of so much of its staff. The cartoon was an insult to women. Running it was an insult to the integrity of your staff.

Marrianne McMullen
Peace & Justice Journal

New York City

The Edward Sorel cartoon in your March 5 issue is disgusting. What on earth was going through your mind when you allowed yourself to print it? I wouldn't be at all surprised if it cost *The Nation* a lot of readers. I certainly think an explanation and an apology are in order. *Robert Weingarten*

SOREL REPLIES

New York City

Lisa Blackshear recalls my talk incorrectly. My diatribe against lazy, unmotivated students was in response to a question about why I no longer teach. I've never tried to justify working for banks to my Politically Correct friends, any more than I've tried to justify working for *The Nation* to my accountant. *Ed Sorel*

EDITOR'S COMMENT

Visual images, even when accompanied by text, as was Edward Sorel's "Enter Queen Lear, Triumphant," speak in a nonrational language. They appeal to the "emotional mind" and gain their power by tapping into and making concrete unstated mythologies, as E.H. Gombrich, the art historian, has observed in his famous essay "The Cartoonist's Armoury." Moreover, almost by definition, cartoonist-caricaturists deal in offensive stereotypes. That, I suspect, is why poison pen-wielders from Daumier to Sorel have, through the ages, run into trouble with the authorities, their audiences, their patrons, their subjects, their editors.

Sorel's cartoon ran into trouble not only with the couple of dozen correspondents and subscription-cancelers represented on our exchange page but also with a preponderance of our staff. Among the staff members' objections: that the cartoon's assumption that money earned in a divorce settlement is somehow less legitimate than money earned selling dog food or, for that matter, selling television shows, is sexist; and that it was the product of a personal vendetta and chauvinistic in its portrayal of an older woman looking foolish. Sorel, in a gracious private letter to "the Unfriendly 34," wrote that his cartoon about Frances Lear is about hypocrisy. "I show a very rich woman who advises other women to be as enterprising as she has been, ignoring the fact that other women don't have the options that come with wealth."

Sorel, it seems to me, has accurately identified the main thrust of his cartoon, and the objectors have accurately identified its most troubling political assumption. Indeed, many of them would argue further that the assumption is sufficiently insidious to disqualify it from publication in *The Nation*.

The merits or demerits of the cartoon aside, I disagree with those who preferred that we not publish it. First, as a general proposition I find political litmus tests counter to the spirit of a magazine that has, over the years, rightly prided itself on its independence; second, I believe it hazardous to attempt to apply such a test to a work of art, which by its nature may resist paraphrase (witness the dispute above over the meaning of Sorel's graphic joke); third, although there is clearly a difference between exercising editorial discretion and censorship, the border between the two can be elusive and crossing it fraught with danger; and finally, it makes a difference that Ed Sorel is a monthly *Nation* columnist—a visual columnist to be sure, but a columnist nevertheless. For better or worse (better, I believe), our agreement with our columnists, chosen in part for the intensity of their convictions and ability to provoke, provides them extra editorial latitude in exchange for the regularity of their brilliance. Although we reserve the right to edit and even kill their columns for reasons of law, taste or other editorial necessities, our side of the bargain is not to *not* publish merely because we disagree with what they have to say. Freelance submissions are, of course, judged by a less permissive standard. The group of thirty-four, alert to these arguments, felt that Sorel had crossed the line; I thought he hadn't.

For the record, I should add that *The Nation*'s artists wrote—in word and picture—overwhelmingly in favor of the Sorel cartoon and its publication. I herewith resist the temptation to paraphrase their case.

Victor Navasky

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Discovery—*The Nation* Prizewinning Poets–1988

The winners of Discovery—The Nation *'88 are Emily Hiestand, Deborah Larsen, Richard Nalley and Peter Schmitt. They will read their poems on Monday, May 2, at 8 P.M., at The Poetry Center, 92nd Street YM-YWHA in New York City. The contest was judged by Nicholas Christopher, Anthony Hecht and Mary Jo Salter. Now in its fourteenth year, the competition combines The Poetry Center's Discovery contest and* The Nation*'s poetry prize. It is open to poets who have not published in book form.*

—Grace Schulman, poetry editor

STITCHING PORCELAIN

After Ricci in Sixteenth-Century China

You yield every species of grain—barley,
millet, winter wheat. You yield rice, figs,
oil of sesame, beef, lamb, goat meat,
hens, ducks, and geese. You do not yield olives
nor almonds: I do not wish for almonds
nor olives. You yield countless horses,
unshod, and no match for the Tartars':
my desire was never to fight the Tartars.
The Yangzi and Yellow Rivers are dense
with your fishes: I lie shuddering with them
at night, dark gill to gill. Though you yield
no lions nor elephants, I once caught sight
in a court in Beijing, of an elephant you had imported.
Your porcelain is so fine, so thin,
a brass wire can repair it
to hold liquids without any leakage.
Once I saw you beneath the bamboo
of a thousand facets—slim sticks,
nodes, and joints—bent back
from the world, stitching porcelain.

I write you a letter of praise
on your own fine cotton paper. I inscribe
all its fibers. My pleasure is in your tea,
your rhubarb, your lacquer, your ginger; I lie
down at the base of your cedar, your tree of mourning.
Here is a candle, rare wax, from the worms you breed
in these trees: its light falls
on hooves that never knew iron
on no olives nor almonds,
on no indigenous elephants.

Deborah Larsen

BARCELONA FROM MONTJUICH

A devotion. The sun that would suck hope
from a sweating Caesar has gone down—
the city below is tumbled and brown
as a thirsty riverbed, where the patient
shadows emerge, thicken and commingle.

Down on the Ramblas, peddlers stroll
with parakeets and ices and after coffee
families hire folding chairs
to watch the local bloods and sailors
tease the tourist girls.

The old General has closed his eyes
at last, but soldiers of the Guardia
still haunt the narrow ways
in their tar-pot hats.

A devotion. For Antonio Gaudi,
crushed by a streetcar,
with blueprints swimming in his head
and everything half-finished;
For Nestor, pensioned gardener of the convent,
who reads the orphans fairy-tale fortunes.

At Nuestra Señora, the cool chapels
of the bedtime saints
are hived with candles.
The night shelves off, the sailors
drift to their anchorage,
the peddlers pack away to their rooms.
Each one stretches out,
content to be home,
because he has been somewhere.

Richard Nalley

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CANDLEPOWER

When a dealership opened (Grand!)
or carnival came into lots outside town,
not far from the dump, we children,
thin and growing up southern godly,
were taken to the big deal by searchlight—
the lamps loose scissors large
as tools of the weird sewing sisters,
their candlepower good to forty miles
in fog from the insolvent river.

The scissors of light searched our skies,
and trees, and on the rise, the transformers
and towers that rung the Tennessee Valley.
The long beams of light flushed the faces
of newel posts in town, briefly ripe,
to the color of pumpkins.

They betrayed themselves at last
to be drawn on flatbed trucks—
kettle drum lights bolted to a rig.
But I loved a cheap stunt
and when we rode through the night,
the lamps that called us to Chevrolets
confirmed in my ignorant heart
that somewhere Heaven was searched
by a Mother Ship
with a round and radiant technology.

Emily Hiestand

GRAVE-RUBBING IN A NEW ENGLAND CEMETERY

Near the center of the cemetery
the high-school students cloak the stone,
kneeling like a family of mourners.

A flurry of motion
could be the planting of flowers,
or the grieving heave of a shoulder.

But nothing funereal transpires here;
and grave-rubbing is not grave-robbing:
the students are busy preserving history.

A pass of the charcoal
and the wingéd skull lifts
onto stretched paper uncurled from a scroll.

It is late spring, almost summer.
Here among the Dickinsons and Mathers
and Bradstreets, the students capture

the fading images and inscriptions
onto paper whose acids will erase itself
in fifty years. Two hundred years ago,

were these stones and sayings thought
to suffice for posterity?
Posterity may be good for, on the outside,
another two hundred years.
Then these narrow plots
may be less distinguishable

than even the small mound
just outside the chain-link fence
skirting the burial ground,

in the corner of the neighbor's yard.
It is here the suicide was banished
from the company of the congregation,

unstoned, the soul outcast in life
to remain there in perpetuity,
uncontaminant of the hallowed soil.

Still it is comfortably
enclosed by the living,
and calls attention to itself

only when a stray ball rolls over it
and up into the air, or by
how thickly the grass grows there,

how difficult a spot it is to mow.

Peter Schmitt

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'I Am Like Aspirin'

ROSS FELD

DIARY: Volume One. *By Witold Gombrowicz. Northwestern University Press. 230 pp. $29.95. Paper $12.95.*

Of the great Central European modern novelists—Kafka, Musil, Broch, Kundera—the crank Witold Gombrowicz remains the most hidden. As a young man, the author of one book of poorly received stories and one strange (and deeply estranging) novel, *Ferdydurke*, he skirted both the avant-garde and traditional literary Warsaws of the 1930s. After accepting an offer of a berth on the 1939 maiden voyage of the brand-new Polish ocean liner *Chobry* (two writers were offered free passage, a public-relations gimmick), he found himself landed in Argentina simultaneous with news of war in Poland. Given the unappetizing choice of where to be landless—in England or Argentina—Gombrowicz decided to stay put, living that whole first year on less than two hundred dollars. Subsequent years of poverty were relieved only when a Buenos Aires bank offered him a sinecure in 1947, which freed him to write the first sustained work of his new life: a journal—*Diary*—which the Polish-émigré paper in Paris, *Kultura*, agreed to publish in installments. From then, matters improved: *Ferdydurke* and three other works were republished in Polish, and he returned to Europe in 1963 thanks to a Ford Foundation grant. Nevertheless, at his death in 1969 *L'Express* would call him "the greatest unknown writer of our time."

Was he? His fellow Pole Bruno Schulz holds greater claim to the melancholy title. Yet Gombrowicz's fiction and plays are vessels for a remarkable, concentrated intelligence. The novels—*Ferdydurke*, *Pornografia*, *Cosmos* (*Trans-Atlantic* hasn't been translated into English)—anticipate (and by comparison dwarf) recent metafictions. Always containing an authorial delegate named Witold (or even Witold Gombrowicz) and featuring an overbearing yet eelish "friend" from whom Witold receives an education about the contingencies of evil, the books are built up out of histrionic digressions that interrupt claustrophobic scenes, setups shaped to spill out certain invariable notions. Above all, form—the great Gombrowiczian tree under which everything else shelters, form understood as the membrane separating the doing from the done-to. Gombrowicz (who, toward the end of his life, called himself "the first structuralist") tugs and snaps at the membrane—and the resulting works are mean comedies about the collapse of will and dignity whenever context is altered or removed.

Form's main playgrounds in Gombrowicz are our accepted ideas of inferiority and superiority, especially concerning age and youth. (His first book of fledgling stories was titled, interestingly, *Stories of Immaturity*—which lazy Warsaw critics of the day jumped all over, calling them "immature stories." Conceivably youth was then forced on Gombrowicz as his main topic—*idées fixes* having a way of rocking on the rails of a defensive grudge.) *Ferdydurke* features an adult clapped back into the childishness of grade school—a schematic of how the superior finds itself in inevitable thrall to the inferior. But unlike Thomas Mann in *Tonio Kröger* and *Death in Venice* (works Gombrowicz acknowledged as guides), the emblematic pathos of the youth/age, fresh/tired, strong/weak, desire/disgust division is never pursued. Gombrowicz instead loved dialectic for its own sensuous sake. Shame and humiliation were valuable as methods of distinction. That may be why, to an English-speaking reader, the novels don't quite satisfy—technique is given such prominence that about a quarter of the way through it's all we're paying attention to. Gombrowicz tramps in gum boots across our backs, and the fixed rhythms turn wearying: ruthlessly theatrical direction leading without fail to the nonconsolations of anti-philosophy.

Yet in the Eastern European literary project of symbol destruction—the collected writings of the previously mentioned geniuses all, in different ways, deflate metaphor utterly—Gombrowicz's work is an important element. And to Polish literature, even more than important: an inflammatory splinter the size of a spar (a book like Tadeusz Konwicki's recent *Moonrise, Moonset* seems a

Ross Feld is the author of Years Out *(Alfred A. Knopf) and* Only Shorter *(North Point Press). His new novel,* Shapes Once Taken, *will be published next year by North Point.*

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direct homage to *Diary*). Aside from a wispy avant-garde, Polish writing from Adam Mickiewicz on, whether in baroque or "plain" style, has its roots in the concepts of the sublime, the brave, the very myth of the Pole. Gombrowicz would have nothing to do with it. To him this reflexive myth crippled talent, pinched thought and encouraged the dubious Polish self at the price of a compromised but more valuable to modern life *I*. He noted, for instance, in the writer Przybyszewski "the incapacity to reconcile the everyday and ordinary with greatness and loftiness. . . . If he had maintained the hearing, taste, and sight of an ordinary man, an attack of convulsive laughter would have saved him from demonic pirouettes. But, being a Pole, he had to kneel. And so he knelt before himself."

This devastation is from *Diary*, his plumbing of Polish culture and politics from half a world away. The work is a shaggy, cunning, stagy, personal peek-a-boo now wondrously undertaken by Northwestern University Press in what's to be three volumes, translated by Lillian Vallee. Gombrowicz's allure—the cussedness, iconoclasm, acuity and perversity—is at full voltage. *Diary* begins with four insistences: "Monday—Me. Tuesday—Me. Wednesday—Me. Thursday—Me." A later entry defends the *I* as

> so basic and inborn, so full of the most palpable and thereby the most honest reality, as infallible as a guide and severe as a touchstone, that instead of sneering at it, it would be better to fall to your knees before it. I think rather that I am not yet fanatical enough in my concern with myself and that I did not know how, out of fear of other people, to surrender myself to this vocation with enough of a categorical ruthlessness to push the matter far enough. I am the most important and probably the only problem I have: the only one of my protagonists to whom I attach real importance.

The word "protagonists" trips a reasonable alarm. Gombrowicz in *Diary* is perhaps producing a fiction. Selected episodes—the nighttime haunting of the Buenos Aires waterfront for boys (while at the same time maintaining amorous relations with young women); the exhilaration of scribbling graffiti on a toilet stall wall; describing a midnight epiphany (a thunderstorm that apparently responds to human hand signals)—mold a flexible, paradoxical, underground character perfect for a novel. Yet precisely because this kind of sovereignly fascinating character doesn't appear in other Gombrowicz novels (or at least not so successfully), it feels safer to guess that if Gombrowicz is doing any conscious fictionalizing in *Diary*, it's strictly in the form of personal reinvention: "My books are not supposed to say to you: Be who you are. They say rather: You pretend that you are who you are. . . . If you hate acting so much, it is because it is a part of you. For me, acting becomes a key to life and reality."

Gombrowicz's presentation of himself as a perpetual *manqué*, someone trying and failing to be a writer, wasn't only a pose. The not-quite was crucially important to him; it served to adjust scale. Magnification (which he hated) and reduction (which he aimed for) camouflage and intermix in life. In the late 1940s, after the Holocaust and the war, existentialism and Marxism both seemed to be reductions. But existentialism's inherent dimensions struck him as not human. "It seems impossible to meet the demands of *Dasein* and simultaneously have coffee and croissants for an evening snack. To fear nothingness, but to fear the dentist more." After reading Camus's *The Rebel*, Gombrowicz notices

> that Camus forbids himself even the pleasure that understanding the world gives. . . . Nowhere in Camus' entire book will one find this simple truth: that a sin is inversely proportionate to the number of people who give themselves to it and this devaluation of sin and conscience are not reflected in a work whose aim is to magnify them.

Even the proportions of Simone Weil's saintliness disturb him:

> Does she want to unite with God or, through God, join other human existences? Is she in love with God, or, through God, with man? Is her resilience to death, pain, and despair born of her bond to God or people? . . . . What a jump into the heavens simply to jump two yards from one's own I to someone else's.

Marxism was worse with its calcifying demands and brutal guarantees, once the exuberance of revolution passes: "The Sartres and Mascolos [the Paris publisher/writer/*gauchiste*] seem to forget that man is a being created to live in an atmosphere of average pressures and median temperatures. Today we know the mortal cold and the living fire, but we have forgotten the secrets of a light breeze, which refreshes and allows one to breathe."

Nor did Art necessarily seem the way out. *Diary* warns against sculpting a new breed of aesthetic monster from the postwar ashes of Poland's horror:

> If Proust got more out of his counts, it was because he could move and feel easily among them and the cookie did not overwhelm him. Four million murdered Jews, however, are the Himalayas! I would ban that typical Polish naïveté that believes that there is something to discover only on peaks. There is nothing on peaks except snow, ice, and rock. . . . When you near the mountains of a million torments with your pen, you are overcome by fear, respect, horror, your pen trembles and your lips produce nothing but a moan. But one does not create literature with moans.

The writer is better off as what Gombrowicz would be himself—a "blunted thought, a being of median temperatures, a spirit in a certain state of relaxation: I am he who relieves tension. I am like aspirin, which, if one is to believe the advertisement, rids one of excessive cramps." Overstatement, but the point sticks. Gombrowicz's principle, "that man is higher than his products," assumes too that the "artist who realizes himself inside art will never be creative." It recommends instead a ***backsliding*** into meaning and significance, an aesthetic direction first suggested by Baudelaire. This is the strategy underlying the amazing entry in *Diary*, Gombrowicz's giddy note about scribbling on a urinal wall: "I hesitated to disclose this. I hesitated not for reasons of prestige but because the written word should not serve to spread certain . . . manias. But I won't hide the fact that never would I have dreamed that such a thing could be this . . . electrifying." Elated by the secretiveness, the vulgarity, he's thrilled far more "because this is not at all on the level of my work."

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For the brilliant on occasion to be dull is nothing less than a spiritual exercise.

Barely tolerable now, *Diary*'s antibrilliance was outrightly rude at the time of its composition/publication. European intellectuals such as Malraux were turning with piety toward the remains of high culture, reclaiming it as a substitute for demoralizing history. But Gombrowicz could spare nothing—and especially culture—the hard errand of candor. "In our relations with other people," he wrote in a late essay,

> we want to be cultivated, superior, mature, so we use the language of maturity and we talk about, for instance, Beauty, Goodness, Truth. . . . But, within our own confidential, intimate reality, we feel nothing but inadequacy, immaturity; and then our private ideals collapse, and we create a private mythology for ourselves, which is also basically a culture but a shabby, inferior culture, degraded to a level of our own inadequacy. This world, said Bruno [Schulz] is composed of the remains of the official banquet: it is as though we were simultaneously at table and under the table.

Czeslaw Milosz has pegged Gombrowicz as "an expert at cornering the reader into an admission of unpalatable truths." Undermining ego, raising shortfall into virtue, consecrating almostness and demi-philistinism, Gombrowicz's astonishing cornering maneuver in *Diary* began with himself. □

Cozy Deals

DAVID WEIR

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES: The Bechtel Story: The Most Secret Corporation and How It Engineered the World. *By Laton McCartney. Simon & Schuster. 273 pp. $19.95.*

In the mid-1970s, a small group of reporters, some freelance and some employed at local publications, formed an ad hoc group in San Francisco, drawn together by a shared concern. Following separate paths, we had all arrived at the same conclusion—something should be written about the San Francisco-based Bechtel Group, the most powerful private corporation in the United States and arguably the world.

But when we pooled what we knew, it was precious little. The construction and engineering colossus employed tens of thousands of people on scores of megaprojects, worth billions of dollars, in dozens of countries. It hired its top executives right out of presidential cabinets, and appeared to be closely allied with the Central Intelligence Agency, especially in the Middle East. It was a major player in the nuclear power, oil and gas industries; it simply bought its way into coal when that looked hot, and it owned Dillon, Read as its piece of Wall Street.

Through our various sources, we had a pretty good idea of its annual sales, which were high enough to place it in the top twenty of the Fortune 500 (since it was a privately held company, Bechtel didn't publish those figures). But, due to the company's almost paranoid obsession with secrecy and its protection by its "friends in high places," Bechtel kept a low profile, so that despite its size and power, relatively few Americans, even in San Francisco, had ever heard of it.

Eventually, one member of our group, Mark Dowie, backed by others of us at the newly formed Center for Investigative Reporting, produced an exposé of Bechtel in *Mother Jones* in 1978. Yet even though that piece may have helped open up Bechtel to the media and to public oversight, most of us still felt that more needed to be done. Now, at last, somebody has continued the job. Laton McCartney has removed more of Bechtel's veils than anyone else. No company can chart its way through the modern world without setting down a substantial public record, and McCartney and his research team have unearthed the important parts of that record.

One danger in writing a book about corporations is that, unlike people, they tend to be boring. They seldom sparkle or dance, become moody or surprise anybody. If by some chance they should choose to die, say to escape liability from the numbers of people damaged by their products, nobody comes to the funeral except lawyers. Usually they are

David Weir, author of The Bhopal Syndrome *(Sierra Club) and co-author of* Circle of Poison *(Institute for Food and Development Policy) and* Raising Hell *(Addison-Wesley), is executive director of the Center for Investigative Reporting.*

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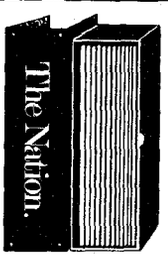

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reborn, sans the liability, but even that is frequently no more than a routine legal matter. In the case of Bechtel, furthermore, except to those who actually like to build the sorts of projects Bechtel undertakes—dams, coal-slurry pipelines and industrial infrastructures—its enterprises are not especially exciting. So I, for one, was grateful that McCartney didn't produce a swollen volume, packed with the sort of tedious detail that obscures a good story. How he set about his work is instructive, from the methodological and political points of view.

He chose to begin with the premise that any institution, no matter how huge, faceless and seemingly powerful, is in reality nothing more than a group of people—over time, a *revolving* group of people. The limitations of the individuals, their fears, insecurities and weaknesses, will eventually reveal themselves through the group's activities. And at Bechtel's highest echelon, we are talking about an extremely limited group of people—a club, really—of men, older men, all white, anti-Semitic, Republican and very rich.

Men like George Shultz, affable, smart, stubborn, greedy and able to get his way through compromise. Shultz is the sort of man the other less sociable and more practical Bechtel executives seem to adore. Or Caspar Weinberger, the temperamental, resentful cost-cutter who was chronically unhappy at Bechtel and forever besieging President-elect Reagan with letters offering his services. Weinberger hoped desperately for the post of Secretary of State, which was eventually bagged by his archrival, Shultz. Or W. Kenneth Davis, who moved from the old Atomic Energy Commission to become head of Bechtel's nuclear operations and went from there to become Deputy Secretary of Energy, thereby controlling a third branch of the Reagan government in ways that might prove useful for his old company. Or Philip Habib, special presidential trouble-shooter in the Middle East, a retired diplomat who has long been on Bechtel's payroll as a consultant. These four men, and others, have helped keep old markets secure while opening up new ones for Bechtel, which has landed billions of dollars in contracts all over the globe as a result.

The movement of executives between public and private life is part of a pattern established much earlier in the company's history: megaprojects always require public money, no matter where they're built. Earlier examples from the Nixon years include C.I.A. Director Richard Helms, who became a Bechtel consul-

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tant; White House political adviser Peter Flanigan, who became a senior partner in Bechtel's investment house Dillon, Read; A.E.C. general manager Robert L. Hollingsworth, who took a high post at Bechtel; and Treasury Secretary William Simon, who also became a Bechtel consultant.

Perhaps the most shameless maneuver was the installation of Henry Kearns, Nixon's former car-salesman pal, as head of the powerful Export-Import Bank. Kearns promptly appointed second-generation family patriarch Stephen Bechtel Jr. and other Bechtelites to the bank's advisory committee. Soon, Eximbank was handing out financing to Third World governments as if it were scrip to Bechtel's company store, and Bechtel was in turn building huge complexes in the Philippines, Iran, Egypt, Algeria and Indonesia. Bechtel's nuclear projects in Spain, Korea, India, Taiwan and Brazil, for example, were underwritten by $1 billion in Eximbank financing. In 1973 Kearns and his deputy resigned after being investigated by the Justice Department for flagrant conflicts of interest. And where did they go? To Bechtel, of course.

But the company's cozy dealings with high public officials go back further yet, to the Eisenhower era, when former Bechtel partner John McCone, as head of the A.E.C., got the company started building nukes and then, as director of the C.I.A., used Bechtel to provide cover for spooks. When McCone was confirmed Congressional hearings revealed that, with his assistance, Bechtel had cleared the awesome sum of $100 million in war profits building ships during World War II. (The relationship between the company and the Company, especially concerning coups in Syria, Iran, Libya and Indonesia, is one of the trickiest parts of the Bechtel story to document, and McCartney does a creditable job of it.)

There is much more in this concise little book, including the family's history and the way each succeeding generation (now the fourth) has reshaped the giant in their grasp, but the book's principal success is in its explanation of how men such as Shultz, McCone, Weinberger, Nixon and Reagan emerge to run our world. Where do such men come from, and where do they think they're going? To a remarkable degree, they come and go through the revolving door between industry and government, and they continue to do so without serious public reprimand. □

Mountain High

JEWELLE GOMEZ

INVENTED LIVES: Narratives of Black Women, 1860–1960. *By Mary Helen Washington. Anchor Press/Doubleday. 447 pp. Paper $7.95.*

RECONSTRUCTING WOMANHOOD: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist. *By Hazel V. Carby. Oxford University Press. 223 pp. $19.95.*

COLOR, SEX AND POETRY: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance. *By Gloria T. Hull. Indiana University Press. 240 pp. $29.95. Paper $10.95.*

The road for the serious black artist, then, who would produce a racial art is most certainly rocky and the mountain is high. Until recently he received almost no encouragement for his work from either white or colored people.

—Langston Hughes

When Langston Hughes wrote those words in *The Nation* in 1926, his assessment of racism's role in the lives of Afro-American artists was stingingly accurate. Sixty-two years later, much the same can be said of the effect of sexism on the publication and critical attention given to writing by black women. The art of Afro-American women has historically been overshadowed by a largely male-identified tradition, from the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s to the black arts movement of the 1960s. Even today, black women writers must contend with a defensive contingent of critics and activists who feel that any honest examination of the black woman's world will destroy the black family. When Ntozake Shange's play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf* opened on Broadway in 1976, critics and black community leaders debated whether Shange was a man-hater or possibly an agent enlisted to lead black women astray. More recently, the film version of Alice Walker's book *The Color Purple* called forth similar responses, ranging from the subtle barbs tossed at her in a *New York Times Magazine* article by black novelist David Bradley to Ishmael Reed's public stance of indignation.

It fell to feminist historians and literary critics of the 1970s to bring to light the work of writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Dorothy West and Pauli Murray. *Invented Lives*, by Mary Helen Washington, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, by Hazel V. Carby, and *Color, Sex and Poetry*, by Gloria T. Hull, are part of an expanding field of criticism written by black women about the work of their sisters. Although all three books consider the same broad period, the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, each offers a quite different perspective on the mountains of race and gender that black women continue to climb.

Ten years ago, in an article called "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," Barbara Smith first urged critics to put the writings of black women in their literary and historical context, taking into account the variety of styles and perspectives that inform our work and examining sexual as well as racial politics. The fifteen prose pieces (novel excerpts, short stories and essays) in Mary Helen Washington's anthology offer just that variety, and her introductory essays answer most of Smith's critical imperatives. Washington begins by acknowledging that "Women's writing is considered singular and anomalous, not universal and representative, and for some mysterious reason, writing about black women is not considered as racially significant as writing about black men." Opening with a segment of Harriet Jacobs's autobiographical *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1860), she goes on to trace the "literary history of black women" up to the 1950s through the works of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Fannie Barrier Williams, Marita Bonner, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, Ann Petry, Dorothy West and the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks, whose neglected, out-of-print novel, *Maud Martha*, is represented here.

Washington's excellence as an editor lies in her careful choice of segments that give a full sense of the writer's career, and her anthology is far more than an assembly of random fragments. Her critical essays, too, will be of lasting value; she has a rare ability both to lay a foundation about each writer's work

Jewelle Gomez is the author of a book of poems, Flamingoes and Bears, *and a vampire novel,* The Gilda Stories, *currently in search of a publisher.*

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for those who are unfamiliar with it and at the same time to offer fresh insights for the initiated. In her essay on Harriet Jacobs, Washington points out the importance of her slave narrative as one of the few dealing directly with the sexual exploitation of black women slaves. She also discusses Jacobs's conscious decision to create not just a historical document but a work of literature, using the sentimental style in vogue at the time. As Washington explains, if the sentimental form seems unsuited to the harsh reality of Jacobs's story, it did help the book to reach its intended audience: the potential supporters of abolition.

Washington is equally diligent in her attention to the work of Harlem writer Dorothy West, whose novel ***The Living Is Easy*** remains as startling today as when it was first published, in 1948. The book chronicles the relentless scheming of its heroine, Cleo Jericho Judson, to gain wealth and prominence, through behavior that's monstrous yet understandable in light of the constricted role women of great drive and sexual energy were forced to accept. Washington's essay examines West's transmutation of Cleo's energy into greed and social striving, and explores the importance of the character of West's own mother, Rachel, in Cleo's creation. Also included is West's moving essay about her mother, written in 1982, which helps to explain the author's difficulty in providing the fictional Cleo with a sense of self-knowledge: "I still cannot put my finger on the why of her. What had she wanted, this beautiful woman? Did she get it?"

Hazel V. Carby's more formal style makes her book less accessible, but she does offer some important observations about the development of Afro-American women novelists. Most writing about the Harlem Renaissance rarely pulls back to allow us to see the artists in the context of national or international movements for equality. Carby is meticulous in providing a historical context for the work she discusses, beginning with her description of the dilemma Frances E.W. Harper faced when she was asked to address the essentially white World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Participation in the exposition was hotly debated among Afro-American activists and artists in 1893, and Harper's decision to speak is analyzed in Carby's book as an important political statement, consistent with the internationalist views expressed in her novels.

Carby considers all the writers in this volume from a global perspective, including Pauline Hopkins, a novelist born in Portland, Maine, in 1859. The author of four novels, Hopkins was also a regular contributor to the ***Colored American Magazine***, and Carby explores the influence of this political and journalistic involvement on her fiction. Her serialized novel ***Contending Forces*** represents, for Carby, an extension of the arguments about America's role in colonialism that raged around Hopkins at the magazine, using the rape, murder and thievery that touch one family through generations as a metaphor. An equally interesting aspect of Hopkins's work, though, is the frequent attribution of "masculine" characteristics to her heroines—an unusual practice in the black literature of that period. While Carby mentions this trait, her tight focus on the issue of colonialism excludes a more detailed analysis of sexual politics.

Unfortunately for those of us outside the university, Carby's valuable insights and information are made less appetizing by academic language and a rigid political focus. Her formal approach to the writing and to the writers' lives makes her book uncomfortably dry, as if it were written merely for scholarly bookshelves rather than the lively audience that is currently exploring and debating black women's writing. She also erroneously places the genesis of black feminist criticism in academia. While the university has begun to take note of black women's work and the growing body of critical literature, the serious discussion of the subject was initiated in alternative women's publications. Smith's "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" first appeared in ***Conditions***, a lesbian feminist journal; ***Home Girls***, the first self-defined black feminist anthology, was published by Kitchen Table Women of Color Press in 1983. Even Alice Walker's early "womanist" critical writing was first published in women's magazines or commercial venues such as ***Ms.*** It is this nonacademic grounding that has made the development of writing by and about black women so eclectic and exciting. The spectrum of writers and critics from Toni Morrison to Audre Lorde and Cheryl Clarke, from Sapphire to Barbara Smith, could not have evolved within the confines of the university. Carby's stylistic distance from those populist roots makes her writing feel less engaged with the important political concepts she is trying to convey.

In her pioneering essay, Barbara Smith

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pointed out the value of letting go of the misleading concept of objectivity: "The critic. . . . would think and write out of her own identity and not try to graft the ideas or methodology of white/male literary thought upon the precious materials of Black women's art. . . . embodying the daring spirit of the works themselves." Gloria T. Hull's *Color, Sex and Poetry* is the work of just such a critic. Hull examines the lives and work of three women writers (primarily poets) of the Harlem Renaissance—Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Angelina Weld Grimké and Georgia Douglas Johnson—with an exuberance that reflects the optimism of the period. She makes Grimké's solitary existence come to life as vividly as Johnson's literary salons. Without being intrusive or trivializing, Hull conveys the impact her research into the lives of these women has had on her own work as a writer and as a reader. Even more significant, she discusses not only gender and its effect on black women writers but also sexuality.

In her introduction, Hull points out that Dunbar-Nelson, Johnson and Grimké were each a bit older than the most popular of the Harlem Renaissance authors, such as Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes. In addition to struggling with their many-faceted careers, these women were also in charge of households. Dunbar-Nelson and Johnson were certainly aware of the inequities of their situation and the rather meager support they and other women writers received in comparison to men. Johnson was a voluminous poet and essayist and hosted one of the most popular literary salons in Washington, D.C., but she still felt impotent at times, repeatedly entreating male friends to show her manuscripts to publishers, correctly assuming their sponsorship was an entree to the publishing world.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson, remembered in history as the widow of America's first nationally known black poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar, also built her own extensive political and journalistic career. She was active in Delaware's Republican State Committee and a section of the American Friends Service Committee, and was engaged to address audiences across the country, both black and white, on racial pride and world peace. She began writing poetry early—her first volume, *Violets and Other Tales*, was published in 1895, when she was only twenty—and she also wrote fiction, essays, newspaper columns and even a film script. Hull follows Dunbar-Nelson's "thematic ambivalence about woman's concept of self and proper role in the world" through many of the phases of her career, and invites us into the personal history that surrounds them. For Hull, Dunbar-Nelson's affectional attachments to women, which seem to have begun with Edwina (Ned) Kruse, principal of the school she taught in, open up a way to understand her work and life. The covert nature of her crushes and those between many women in her social set become emblematic of the circuitous route many women have to pursue to get what they want in life.

But it is when Hull examines the life and work of Angelina Weld Grimké that the influence of gender and sexuality becomes most obvious. A niece of the famous abolitionist and feminist Angelina Grimké Weld, Grimké grew up in a genteel activist household outside Boston. During the Harlem Renaissance, she lived in Washington, D.C., where she wrote poems and plays and corresponded with a number of the period's noted literary figures. She always maintained her physical distance from the active community of writers whose names flew through the literary skies of Harlem, although she published most of her work in the same journals they did. She devoted much of her time to teaching and caring for her father until his death.

Hull gives Grimké's life and poetry a close reading, and suggests that much of her work remained unpublished because of its lesbian content. The poems and plays she did publish generally conformed to the conventions of that period: There were political appeals and pastoral descriptions, some of them written in dialect. But fears that her lesbianism might be discovered, along with the stress of her father's long illness, impeded Grimké's work. She was torn between her desire for recognition as a poet and her fear of expressing her deepest feelings as a lesbian; Hull speculates that the effort to censor herself may have been the root of her indecisive commitment to writing. With her study of Grimké and her book as a whole, Hull opens up a very important discussion about the part sexuality plays in the growth and appreciation of black women's writing. It is an issue frequently discussed in lesbian journals, and it certainly deserves attention when looking at all black women's work. Hull's candor about these women's lives indicates that the mountainous terrain of sexuality must be tackled in order to make a place for a full, realized body of litera-

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ture by Afro-American women.

After her father's death Grimké moved to New York City, which was by then less hospitable to the black literati. There were fewer venues for publication, and patrons were withdrawing into other areas of "primitive" art. She died alone and unknown in a Harlem apartment in 1958, and one of her most moving poems provides a melancholy epitaph for her. It also poses the question that Washington, Carby and Hull answer so exuberantly with their books:

The days fall upon me
One by one, they fall,
Like Leaves. . . . .
They are black,
They are gray.
They are white;
They are shot through
with gold and fire.
They fall,
They fall
Ceaselessly.
They cover me,
They crush,
They smother.
Who will ever find me
Under the days? □

SIGN

Set to force the dying doe
into deep water, we wade out
till my father stumbles—

he raised her since a fawn,
holds back my hand. Stunned
in place, water rising,

we look to the sky
to find ourselves
single-minded, cleared.

But like trapped wasps who
batter themselves on window glass
ignoring open air above,

as hard as we look
we see ourselves still
as we are,

there, chilled,
doubt obvious as blood on snow,
as the raven waiting,

until the doe, between us,
cradles the top of her head
in seawater, rocking her hurt

into tide, stirs
the dormant night plankton
into a trail of greenish stars.

Deborah Tall

FILMS.

JAMES LARDNER

Stand and Deliver
The Milagro Beanfield War

I suppose it was unrealistic of me to think I would be able to say, after watching a movie about the teaching of calculus, what calculus is; and I don't rightly know why I expected the movie to convey some understanding of the techniques with which its real-life hero, Jaime Escalante, manages to plant higher math in the heads of a fairly ragamuffin bunch of Hispanic teenagers in East Los Angeles. Perhaps these delusions had their roots in a recent article in *The New York Times*, which told of the long hours that Tom Musca and Ramon Menendez, who collaborated on the screenplay, spent observing Escalante at work; of the rocky journey that their project traveled en route to finding a home with the public-television series "American Playhouse"; and of the astonished reactions that the finished film, *Stand and Deliver*, elicited from assorted Hollywood muckamucks, including the ones at Warner Bros. who eventually decided to let it into the nation's movie theaters. "It puts Hollywood to shame," Jeffrey Katzenberg, chair of Disney Studios, is reported to have said. (He added that since he didn't think Disney could do the film justice, he wasn't interested in distributing it.)

When one does not live in Hollywood, one sometimes forgets how very little in the way of unconventionality it takes to set the antennae of that tranquil community's leaders aflutter. In this case, what seems to have done the job is the mere notion of using poor people and slums as something other than a battleground between cops and drug peddlers—that, and a middle-aged hero with more than the usual amount of waist and less than the usual amount of hair. In form, *Stand and Deliver* sticks to familiar pathways. Musca and Menendez may be young, but somebody—if not at U.C.L.A., then over at the school of hard knocks—has taught them the essential lesson of the new Hollywood: When a story seems to be verging near some difficult intellectual or emotional question, you DISSOLVE QUICKLY TO: ELSEWHERE. As a result, the audience of *Stand and Deliver* is spared the trauma not only of watching Escalante's students come to terms with calculus but of watching their transformation from hooligans and daydreamers into a worshipful cadre that hangs on his every word like the extras in an E.F. Hutton commercial. These things just happen, and mostly offscreen. It's too bad that footnotes haven't become part of movie grammar; if they had, *Stand and Deliver* could instruct us, at such troublesome junctures, to refer to the equivalent scenes in *Blackboard Jungle* and *To Sir, With Love*.

No doubt, if we could see the first draft of Musca and Menendez's screenplay, or perhaps even the rough-cut of the film, we would learn more about life in Jaime Escalante's classroom than we do from the 103 minute film on which Warner Bros. and its market analysis people have conferred their approval. No doubt, too, we would know something about how Escalante came to be the man he is, and what might happen if other teachers tried to replicate his achievements. The film leaps over, or circles around, a host of questions, and when the time comes for a climax it homes in on a confrontation with the Educational Testing Service—an enemy that, however deserving of our contempt, is peripheral to the story. The E.T.S. suspects Escalante's students of cheating. After some *Sturm und Drang* involving a pair of E.T.S. investigators who seem to have walked in out of *Miami Vice* (on which the star of *Stand and Deliver*, Edward James Olmos, with more hair and less waist, plays a detective), the class takes the test again, and again performs splendidly. We never fully understand the "unusual agreement of incorrect answers" that launched the investigation in the first place.

Like so many American movies of late, *Stand and Deliver* winds up being about grit and determination and victory. It aims to leave us feeling all warm inside, albeit unburdened by any fresh knowledge or insight, lest, in quest of these objectives, it commit the high crime of taxing some part of the audience's patience. It should really have been called *Stand Up and Cheer*, and I suppose there are worse things to cheer than a film that treats such an estimable man with such respect. Musca and Menendez have obviously worked at capturing Escalante's patter, which is delightful. ("You burros have math in your blood!" he tells his students. "Did you know that neither the Greeks nor the Romans could deal with zero? It was your ances-

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tors the Mayans who understood the concept of zero.") Olmos, given a year to prepare for the role, studied Escalante relentlessly, in person and on tape, put on forty pounds and had his hair plucked. The film is well shot and nicely edited, and it has an altogether likable cast. What it lacks is the quality that would truly have put Hollywood to shame: the sort of trust in its audience that Escalante has in his.

The Milagro Beanfield War is as defiant in form as in subject. It dares to dawdle. At its best, this belated adaptation of a 1974 novel by John Nichols has some of the charm of a rural, Hispanic version of Vittorio De Sica's *Miracle in Milan*, although the most valuable quality that the director, Robert Redford, brings to it may be his sense of fearlessness rather than his sense of whimsy. Redford has been around, and on top, long enough that he doesn't have to worry about where his career is heading.

The premise of *The Milagro Beanfield War*—a conflict over water rights between the inhabitants of an impoverished New Mexican town and the developers of a housing-and-recreation complex—recalls any number of movie and TV westerns. But the movie knows its parallels, and plays off them. Its villains are prepared to do anything to get their way—anything except run the risk of a bad press. When the situation threatens to get violent, an old man walks into the general store, asks for a box of ammunition and pays with food stamps. The Eastern dude who comes to town is an oral historian from New York University. The forces of good are led, eventually, by a semiretired newspaper publisher and public-interest lawyer who is the modern equivalent of the retired sheriff in *High Noon*, except what he has sworn never to use—and is forced to resort to—is his quick tongue.

The Milagro Beanfield War doesn't stay with you, but it's good company while it's around, mostly because of an excellent cast that includes Rubén Blades as a devoutly nonviolent sheriff; John Heard as the lawyer/publisher; Sonia Braga as the town mechanic who prods Heard into action; Melanie Griffith as the developer's bleached-blond missus; Carlos Riquelme as an old man who talks to the ghost of his best friend; and Daniel Stern as the man from N.Y.U. (The film has only one really off performance, by Christopher Walken, as the state-employed thug who is sent down from the capital to take care of things.) And while *Stand and Deliver* tells its story in snippets, *The Milagro Beanfield War* provides its actors with scenes they can sink their teeth into.

Without Redford's clout, of course, *The Milagro Beanfield War* could never have attracted these people, or the backing of Universal Pictures. Without Olmos, *Stand and Deliver* would be stuck on PBS. In the cult of a thousand personalities, such are the means by which the 17 million Americans of Spanish descent are at last being "discovered." □

FILMS.

PETER BISKIND

Colors

Colors, a cop thriller starring Sean Penn and Robert Duvall and set in the druggie world of Los Angeles gangs, is Dennis Hopper's just-say-no movie, his ticket to respectability. A notorious substance abuser in the 1960s and 1970s, and *auteur* of the countercultural classic *Easy Rider*, Hopper has gained enormous celebrity in the last few years playing the role he used to live, and in *Colors* he further distances, in fact criminalizes, his past by linking the drug culture of which he was a part to the violent black and brown underworld of Watts and East L.A.

Colors feels like those anti-Communist movies 1950s studios forced on suspected fellow-traveling directors to test the sincerity of their newly professed patriotism. It even sports one of those alarming, pseudodocumentary prefatory titles that were fashionable in films such as *Blackboard Jungle* and *On the Waterfront*. This one informs us that the gangs are armed with Uzis and the police are badly outnumbered. Doubtless it is intended, as is usual with such messages, to disarm critics because ironically the real L.A.P.D. has greeted Hopper's valentine with a marked lack of enthusiasm, fearing, apparently, that the film's dramatic depiction of the life styles of the poor and infamous will prompt the teen-age desperadoes it deplores to assault middle-class L.A. with automatic weapons. Curtis Sliwa, arch-Guardian Angel, has even staged a pro-

Peter Biskind is executive editor of Premiere.

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test in front of Sean Penn's home.

The plot of this film, what there is of it, concerns the threadbare conflict between a wise cop near the end of his career, played by Robert Duvall, and his partner, a young, kick-ass hotshot, played by Penn. Duvall wants to make friends with the bloods on the block in the hope that when something heavy comes down, they'll trust and help him. Penn just wants to shoot anything that's black or brown and moves. Not exactly a bold foray into unknown narrative territory.

Perhaps we've been spoiled by the economy and precision of *Hill Street Blues*, in which a situation was routinely set up, explored and resolved in thirty minutes, but the dilatory pace of *Colors* is maddening. The first hour or so is enlivened by almost no story at all; rather, it consists of endless traveling shots of colorful wall murals partially obscured by scary looking black teen-agers lounging against them—all taken from the vantage point of Duvall and Penn's cruising yellow junker. Every once in a while the film's Fashion Moda tour of the indigenous graffiti is punctuated by a clumsy, squad-room scene in which the guys are revved up for another stint in the jungle, or a frantic car chase down a narrow alley in pursuit of a fast receding black figure.

Duvall and Penn, who have both done considerably better elsewhere, have been given precious little to work with. Duvall could have played this role in his sleep, and more or less does; he looks alternately amused with and bored by the proceedings. Penn glides through the film combing his hair in the rearview mirror of his car, as though this mannerism were all that were needed to realize his part. There's one unintentionally amusing vanity scene in a gym, whose ostensible purpose is to allow Penn to apologize to Duvall for being such a jerk, all the while striking a Schwarzenegger pose with his biceps splayed like fish fillets over a leather backrest.

Since the story is so feeble, and the execution so perfunctory, it's hard not to regard *Colors* as an allegory of Hopper's journey from the sixties to the eighties, from pariah to (last year's) Oscar nominee. From this point of view, the blacks, with their sullen looks and largely unintelligible street patois, are unredeemably bad and irremediably alien and other, indeed brothers from another planet. They are Hopper's bad old self. The Hispanics, on the other hand, are potentially salvageable, Hopper's better half. They are humanized and individualized, even played by an occasional recognizable actor, like *Hill Street* veteran Trinidad Silva. The Hispanics play by the rules, exchange favors with the cops, in short, collaborate. It's the old Geronimo, No! Cochise, Si! social-control game familiar from countless Hollywood westerns.

The black/brown, extremist/moderate conflict on the streets is echoed in the running battle between reasonable, likable, "liberal" Duvall, and the violent, arrogant, "reactionary" Penn. The question is, who will emerge as the real Dennis Hopper?

The answer, surprisingly, is neither, and this is where Hopper's nihilism finally allows the film to elude the traditional alternatives laid down by the script. At the end, only Penn survives. He has a new partner, a young hotshot who reminds him of himself—as he used to be. He's now a bit older, a bit wiser and he's internalized Duvall's values. But by this time, it's too late; they've been discredited. Although the film prefers Duvall and the Hispanics to Penn and the blacks, Duvall's strategy backfires. When Silva does give him a useful tip, a rival black gang finds out and massacres Silva's pals. And Duvall is killed by the Hispanics, not the blacks.

It's a senseless death, nearly an accident, underlining the meaninglessness of the whole enterprise. When all is said and done, the cops are irrelevant. The guy they're looking for, the target of the manhunt that has structured the whole film, is killed by another gang member in a suicidal shootout. Moreover, both the blacks and browns, the extremists and the moderates, turn out to be equally unsalvageable. The social worker who tries to talk the Hispanic gang out of life on the street is unable to answer their skepticism or counter their defeatism. In some ways, the moderates are worse, because less predictable. Everyone is sucked under by the uncontrollable downward spiral of violence between the gangs.

Colors may evoke the 1950s, but it has none of the easy optimism of films like *Blackboard Jungle*. Perhaps the best thing about it is the flip side of its weak narrative line—an almost documentary feel for the ambiance if not the truth of the gang subculture. And so far as Hopper goes, *Colors* is ultimately too dark to achieve what he perhaps wanted of it. It's not so easy to change your, well, colors. □

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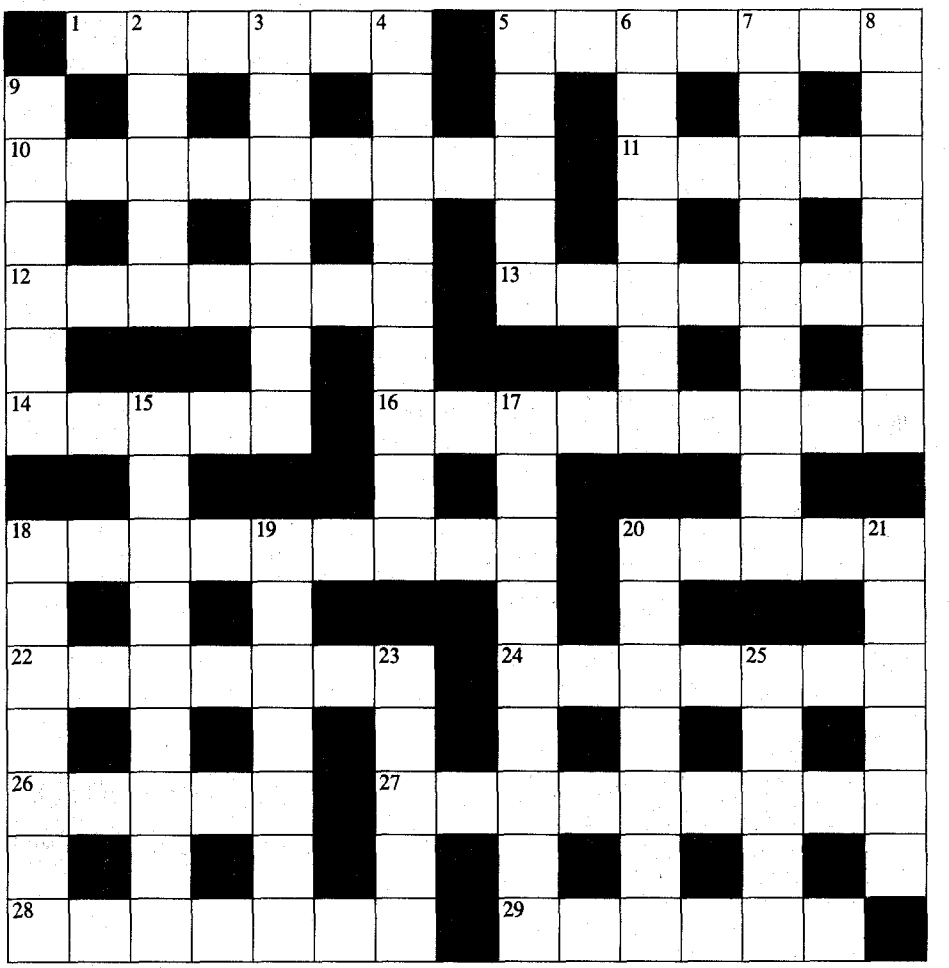
LOCAL ONE UNION GRAPHIC ARTS GUILD NEW YORK X-523

Crossword Puzzle No. 2195

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 and 5 Pejorative for older woman and young minx, too—showing how some were supposedly thrown out. (3,3,7)
10 Where the charge was notorious for a namesake of the head covering. (9)
11 Proving the wrong route could lead to bizarre consequences. (5)
12 One way to hold a piece of money which is sort of tan in the center. (7)
13 It takes a month to go to a city in the South (and North!). (7)
14 Chopped dates are enough to get you filled up. (5)
16 What a bird might do to an opening in the skin, in the far east. (9)
18 If this went down instead, it would be verbally punished, but as it is, it is very presentable. (7,2)
20 It used to be associated with reeds and pipes, but now modern power has frequently taken over. (5)
22 A British man to allow you to get a wreath around your head. (7)
24 The slippery type circle around, acting drunk, perhaps. (7)
26 Nine to one on the wheel-bound king? (5)
27 Donnybrook or Scarborough (or Widdecombe) hassle? (Who says there was never a just war!) (4,5)
28 Not a missing quality in some, perhaps exhibited by violets, as they say. (7)
29 Laments like a Scot, when otherwise hails like this. (6)

DOWN

2 and 15 Completely exhausted with kinfolk? (That's the way to keep things from the neighbors!) (3,2,3,6)
3 and 19 One certainly is not still graceful with it. (7,7)
4 Given medicine containing a gin sling, which is what the doctor might have done. (9)
5 A boss for the Swahili once, but pale in some degree. (5)
6 and 20 down The painter is in a state all right, with the professional charge mounting, and some sign of iron at last. (7,7)
7 Time is fleeting with this, as they say. (Mr. Carney is pretty tall, too.) (3,2,4)
8 What getting a lift might do to the British in particular? (7)
9 Is it a form of oriental adder which multiplies easily? (6)
15 See 2
17 Not an equal ruler, notice! (Don't stop for long.) (2,7)
18 Plays down something when the creed is misinterpreted. (7)
19 See 3
20 See 5
21 Deny the truth of old Mr. Turner for example coming inside. (6)
23 Clumps of hair pulled out at college? (5)
25 Got in the other way around, to find the bar. (5)

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT

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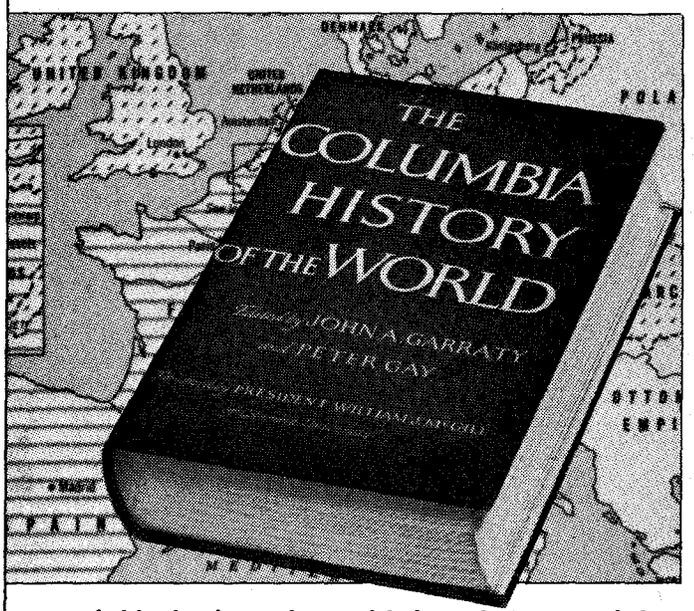

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